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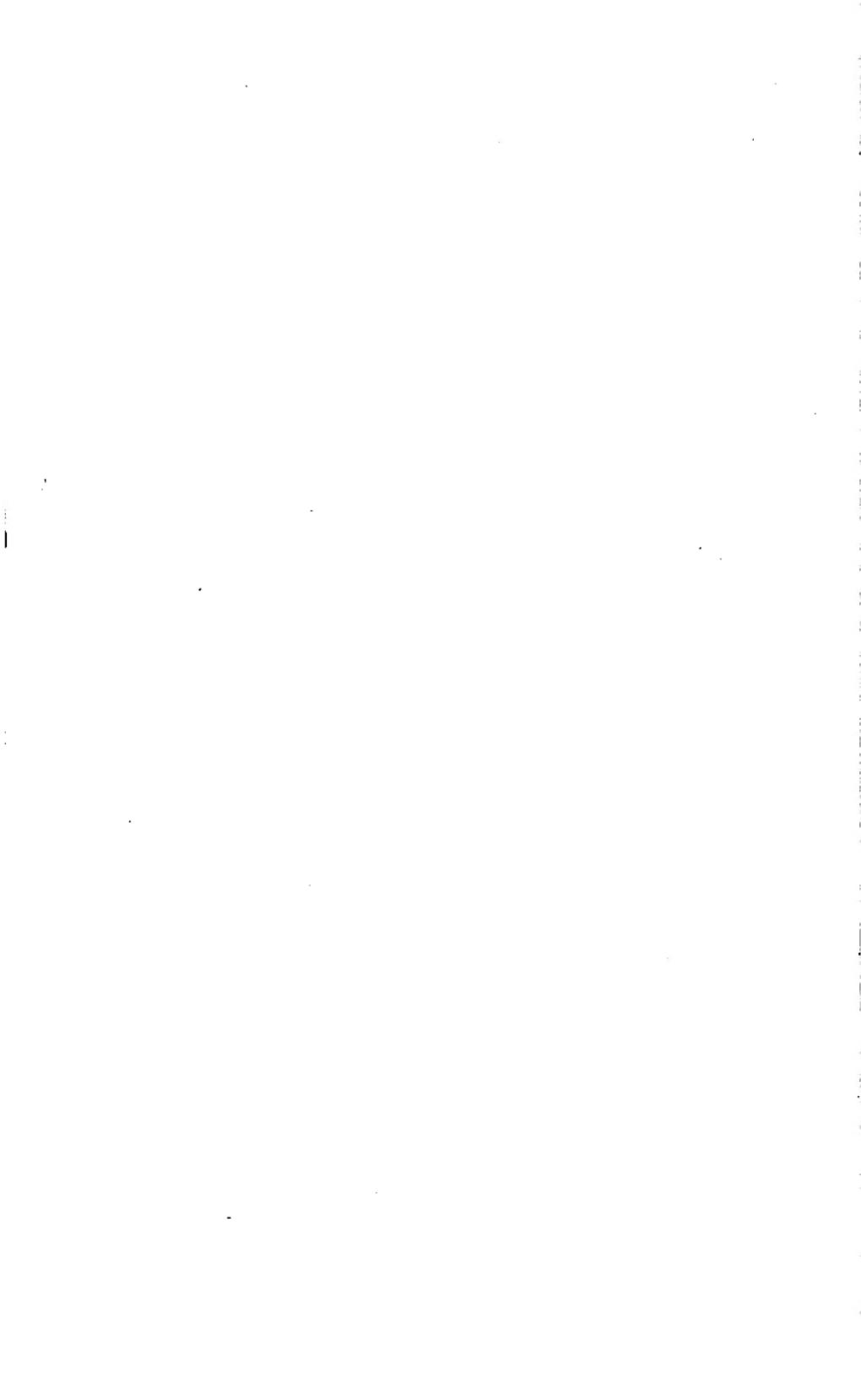
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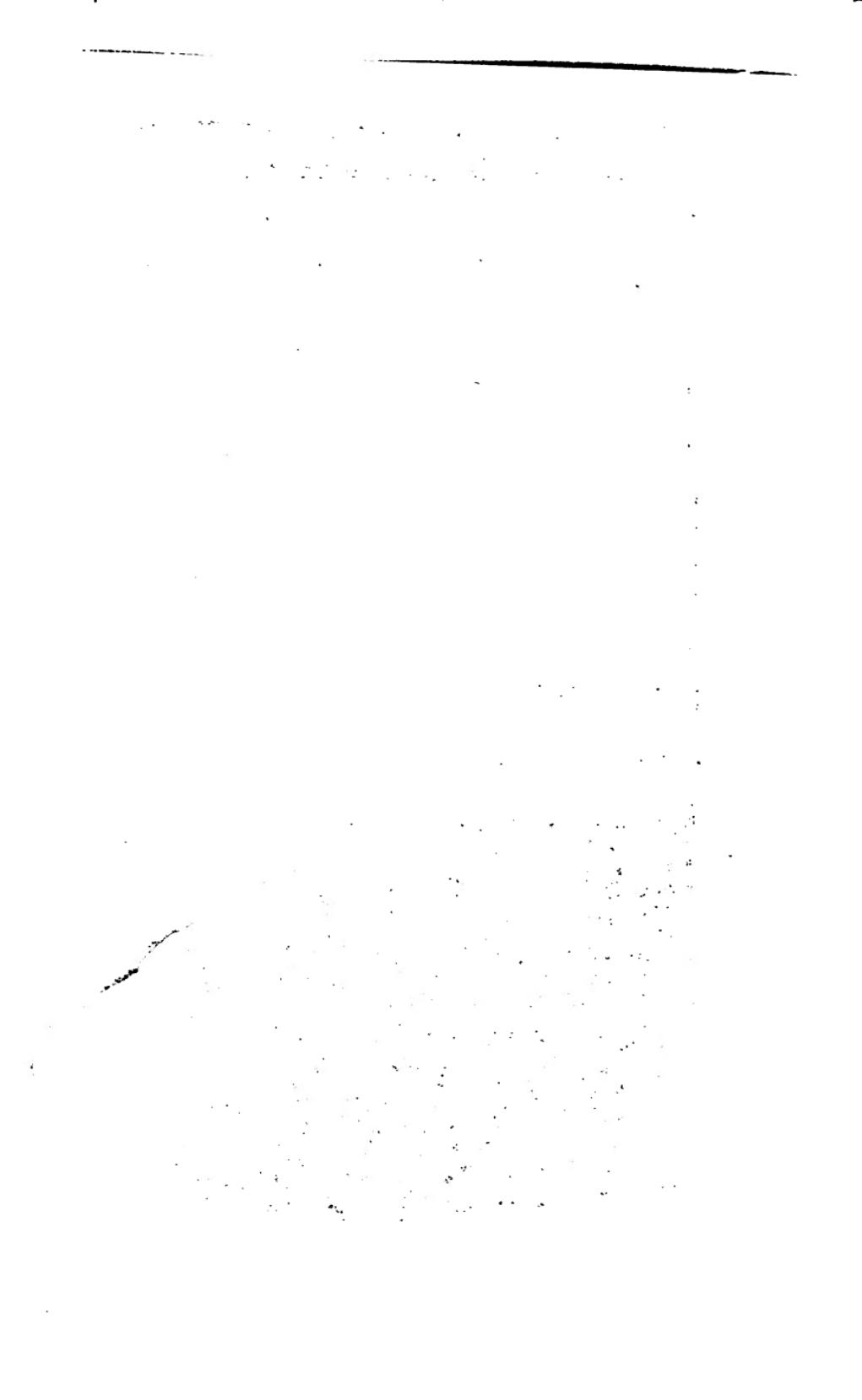
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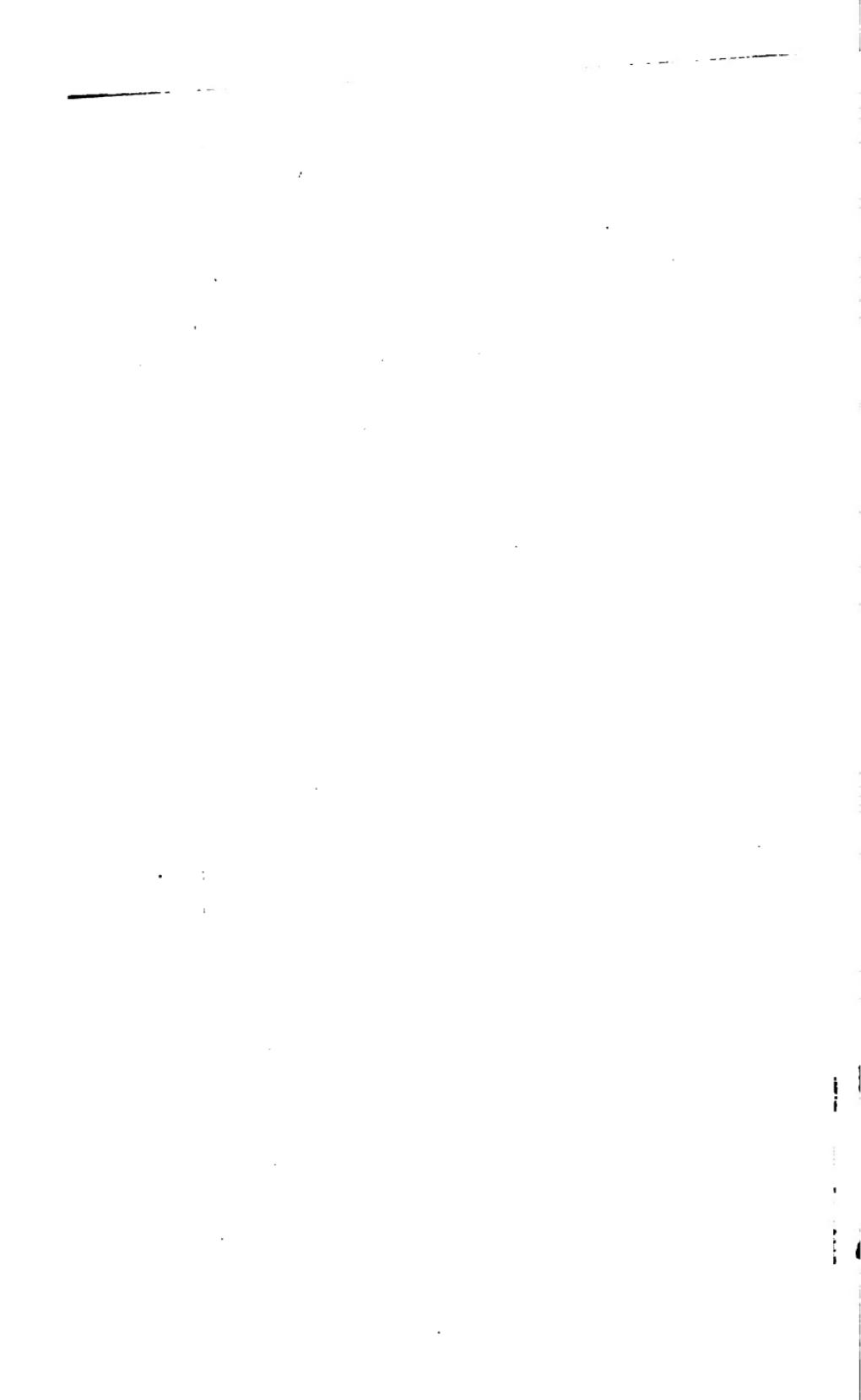
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DISCORDS: BY GEORGE EGERTON

Bright, Mary Chavelita (Dunne) [pseud.]

LONDON: JOHN LANE, VIGO ST
BOSTON: ROBERTS BROS., 1894



KPE 1779



Edinburgh : T. and A. CONSTABLE, Printers to Her Majesty

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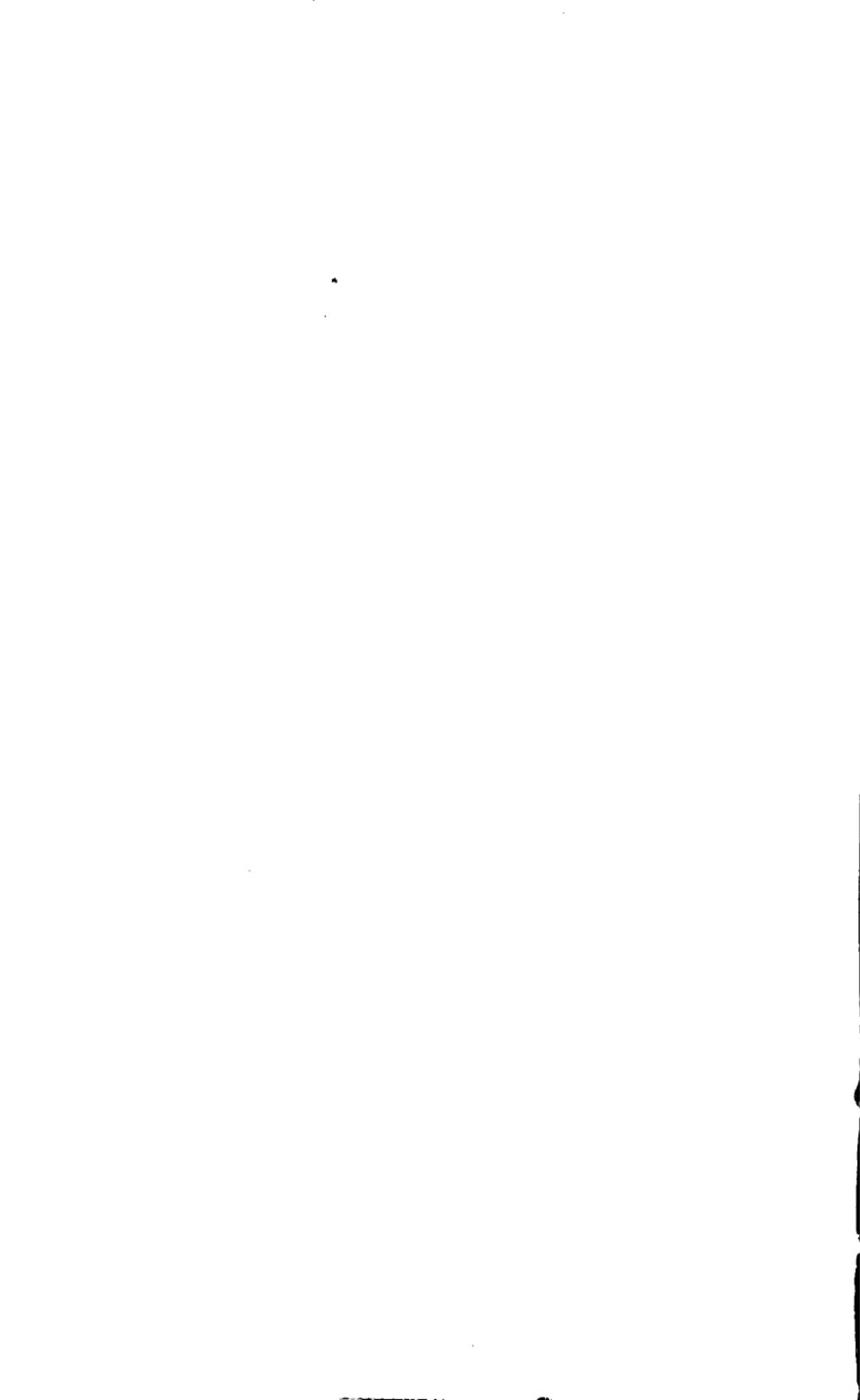
T. P. GILL

'Here carry this to my Gossig'

'Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile.'

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A PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT AT THREE PERIODS

I.—THE CHILD

THE lamp on the nursery table is yet unlit, and the waning daylight of the early spring throws the part of the room near the window into cold grey shadow. The fire burns with a dull red glow in the lower bars ; it has been slacked ; just one little bubble of gas seethes like a ball of molten jet and flickers into a bluish flame.

The quick patter of little feet, and the sound of quarrelling child voices, broken by the deeper note of a woman's voice raised in gentle chiding, comes up from below stairs.

A child is crouched on the old hearthrug, holding a book to the firelight. Her eyes run greedily along the lines, one little red hand holds the top of the right-hand page in eager readiness to turn it over ; her long, tangled elf-locks catch a ruddy glint each time her head moves.

A bit of coal drops, and the flamelet goes out ; she lifts her head and draws a deep breath ; she is trembling with excitement, for she has been holding it unconsciously. She makes a move to

stir the fire, but a shade passes over the questioning child-face as the inner voice that she alone knows of, of which not even the tender little mother has an inkling, begins its warning and reproach.

'Shut the book now—now, just when the exciting part begins. No, you may not read to the end of the page—no, not even a line more. If you want to be brave, if you want to be strong, sacrifice ; sacrifice, mortify yourself. If you don't want to ! No, you are weak, you cannot do that, not even that small thing, for God. No, not after supper ! Not until to-morrow, to-morrow evening——' The small head with the straight white parting bends over the closed book, and a sobbing sigh floats out into the room full of shadows.

She rises slowly and puts the book away, high up on a shelf on the old bookcase, and then looks fearlessly round her. If she were only round the next lobby, past the closed door of the empty room where the coffin once stood, where the chill air seems to rush out and play down one's back like the cold, cruel taps of long, clutching fingers. She steals out hurriedly, tip-toeing unconsciously, and whispering with throbbing breathlessness, 'Guardian angel, O dear guardian angel ! take care of me !' leaving a space for the angel on the side next the door. A flying jump, a clutch at the balusters, and the lobby where the tall clock mounts guard is safely reached. The light streams up from the hall below, and the cheery rattle of the milk-boy's can on the steps, and the smell of

A PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT 3

rice slightly burned, strike warmly to her heart. But the face of the old clock seems to look mockingly down at her, and its tick-tock speaks with a jeering voice to the panting child—the house is full of voices. ‘You be a Grace Darling! you be a Maid of Orleans! Afraid! afraid! Coward! coward! go back right to the nursery door—yes, to the very door, and count ten outside of it.’ She is rolling her holland ‘pinny’ into a mass of hopeless creases, and the look on the grave small face is half defiant, half pleading. ‘Tick, tock, afraid, afraid! Leave you be? No, you must be strong. God wants you; you must be strong! Offer it up for a poor soul!’ The little shrinking figure goes wearily up again, halts outside the closed door, and kneels. Then she comes down backwards, resolutely facing the dreaded door.

‘Summer, the wanton youth, is carrying all before him.’

The playground of a girls’ school is thronged with laughing pupils; snobbery, toadying, gossip and backbiting, all the vices of matured society, flourish there in miniature. The daughters of the prosperous pawnbroker are snubbed and patronised by the shabbily-clad offspring of the half-pay captain, who owes two quarters’ schooling and had the bailiffs in last week; the girl with the most pocket-money and the prettiest frocks is courted and flattered to her face, and made fun of behind her back, as they mimic her important, ‘Me uncle the Bishup o’ Durry! ’

DISCORDS

Under an old elm-tree in a corner a group of girls is gathered. Four of them are listening intently to the fifth, a diminutive thing, class-mate by virtue of brains not years. Her voice is peculiar, and she speaks without a trace of accent, whereas the anaemic-looking girl next her has Doblin in every vowel. The two, with arms entwined, are sworn to inseparable friendship ; they wear a bit of each other's hair in silver lockets under their frocks, and think of each other every evening when the clock strikes nine. All follow the speaker's words with rapt attention, for as she warms to her narrative one telling expression trips up the other, and they break into laughter, with the shrilly giggling zest of early girlhood at a supremely daring climax. Only the fourth, a square-faced girl with steady pale-grey eyes, thin lips, and smooth, foxy hair dragged back from a broad forehead, gazes questioningly at her. The little one flushes as she catches the look, and when the bell rings she tucks her hand coaxingly under the other's arm, and adds an unnecessary detail, a stronger touch, as if to compel her belief.

She talks until they gain their places at the desk, and silence is commanded. The pale-grey eyes study her face curiously, and an almost imperceptible smile plays about the thin mouth ; the same may be seen any day on her father's face in the Green Street Court-house, when he pins a witness under cross-examination.

A PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT 5

'Tired, childie ?'

'Yes, mumsy, awful tired.'

'Perhaps you ran about too much in the heat, dearie ?'

'No, mumsy, I didn't ! It's not that way—I am tired *in me*. Does everybody think, I mean, ask about things, in one ? I want to know so many things—I think such a lot, and'—with a half-sob—'oh, oh, I wish I didn't !'

The mother draws her down to the heart under which she lay cuddled long before thought came, and smooths back the dusky hair from the hot forehead with tender fingers, needle-pricked over tiny garments for ever-coming human problems.

'Tell mother, dearie !'

'Ah, there's so much, mumsy, there's so much pain in the world. It's everywhere ! Those horrid Chinese with their torturing, and all the poor animals ; oh, I can't bear it ! Why did God make us when He knew we'd be wicked ? when He knew we'd go to hell ? and when we want so hard to be good, and there's always something inside making us do bad things—oh ! why did He ? why did He ?'—sob—'I can't think it was right of Him !'—with passion—'Oh, oh, it wasn't !'

'H-u-ssh, childie !' says the mother, and she rocks her slowly to and fro, and whispers softly :

'It's best not to question, lovey—far best. Just trust God, as you trust me when I tell you something is for your good. Keep on and do what you believe to be right yourself. Mother's own dear little girl, her own little one !'

There is a singular look on the child's face, a look of resolute repression ; and when she raises it and kisses the worn, lovable face above hers, the spirit that looks up out of her eyes is older than the spirit that looks down out of the mother's.

And when the city clocks are pealing forth the midnight chimes, and the weary mother folds up the mended socks and puts them away, and goes her nightly round, and bends over each tiny cot, she stays longest at the bigger white bed, and makes, Spanish fashion, the sign of the cross with her thumb on the child's hot forehead, little dreaming that the lonely little soul has cried herself to sleep with the knowledge of having grown beyond her help.

Noon the next day—a hot, bleached noon.

Under the elm-tree three of the same girls are waiting. She comes out through the school-house door. Two sparrows are picking up crumbs on the flagged walk. A stump of pencil is lying next an orange peel. Every detail of that big yard, with its groups of chattering girls, pieces of greasy lunch paper, and the three figures waiting under the elm-tree in the corner, bites into her brain, a mind-etching never to be effaced.

She slips quickly down the path, and although every nerve is braced to support her in a tremendous resolve, although she feels a sick, cold, sinking weight in her stomach, she avoids treading on the joinings of the flag-stones, and takes two short steps where the space is very big. They are waiting for her, for is she not the most gifted,

A PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT 7

the most daring, the most individual amongst them? Perhaps the set, unsmiling whiteness of her face strikes them as unusual. They stop talking; they just wait.

She stands before them; opens her mouth; but something rises in her throat and checks her speech; she masters it:

'You know what I told you yesterday,' she says; 'well, it was untrue, every, every bit of it—no; at—at least there was a little true, but I added all the rest, made it up, just lied for the sake of lying.'

There is a silence, at least it seems to her that they are standing inside a silent circle and that the long giggling scream of 'Tagg' of a triumphant catch comes to them from some far-off place. The friends search one another's eyes; the same expression is in both, not shocked, not a bit, but as folks look away from a mad person, half afraid; they cling a little closer to one another and turn away in silence. The anaemic girl shifts her feet irresolutely and presses her hands together until the knuckles crack, and says with her weak monotonous voice, with a nervous desire to console:

'Never mind, dear; ma says you can't help exaggeratin'; for pa says your father's the biggest loiar out!'

Then she, too, goes away, and the child leans her head against the trunk of the old tree. She feels that grinding her forehead into its rough bark would be a relief, her cheeks are so hot, and

her eyelids smart so. She bites her tongue in her self-abasement. She had hoped they would have understood how much it cost her to tell them the truth—and yet—in between it all, had there not lurked an idea that they would think it nobly done of her? How the poor little soul cringes as this fresh bit of self-knowledge strikes home to her! Well, she has promised that she would punish herself, that she would tell each girl to whom she had lied the truth. She turns at the sound of a heavy step behind her, to face the cold grey eyes in the square face—‘Her too, her too!’ craves the voice. All the exalted spirit that spurred her on has fallen flat, only a sick feeling of useless shame remains, weighing heavily on the poor puzzled child-soul. Well, she will drain the chalice to the dregs, so she begins quaveringly:

‘You know wh——’

‘I know; they told me. Come and wash your face. I think you were a fool to do it.’

II.—THE GIRL

YELLOW sunshine flooding an autumn world, gold-brown leaves falling like shivered mica on the great highway that is straight and dusty and long, crossed by other straight and dusty roads, running as the squares of a chess-board across the flat landscape.

The road is flanked on each side by alternate

A PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT 9

poplars and beeches, and their foliage honeycombs the white dust and the grey-green grass with flecks of quivering shadow.

Here and there at great intervals a clump of trees clusters about a villa, or an orchard, or forms a leafy square at the back of a farmhouse, or a long line of pollard willows defines a dyke. At the vanishing-point of the double line of trees flanking the highway, red-tiled roofs, a spire, and the tops of some canvas tents form a trefoil, and away across the flat brown land windmills lean against the horizon, with their sails at ease, like giant moths asleep on outstretched wings.

The scene, with its absolute serenity and subtle suggestion of delicate decay, suggests a Cuyp, an autumn study in quiet yellows and browns.

A child-girl is herding some lean cows that crop the dusty herbage under the trees at each side of the wide road. She is a thin, unformed thing of unlovely angles, with dirty flaxen hair clubbed short at her neck under a close-fitting cotton cap. Her dingy green stuff bodice and homespun skirt hang loosely, and her check apron is patched with newer brighter pieces. Her footless stockings just reach her ankles, and their strong bones and her shining red heels peer out of her wooden shoes. She is knitting a coarse stocking, and she presses the needle tightly against her flat, childish bosom as she knits off the stitches. Tink ! tink ! the bell-cow jangles a cracked bell as it stoops. Her eyes look wistfully towards the tents in the village ; she can see the bright flutter of a flag. Her

needles stop, and she stands still unconsciously, lost in dreams of the glorious future when she may go to service in the town, perhaps at the Burgomester's, when she will be free to visit the Kermesse and to ride in the carousals and see the dwarfs and all the sights that make it such a place of wonder. Ah! how much would she not give for a glimpse of the tigers and lions; the tigers above all, great striped cat-like things—she has seen them on a print on the school-house wall—and sometimes at night when the great farmhouse is quiet and her straw pallet over the cowshed is shrouded in gloom, and the snoring, laboured breathing of the cattle seems to fill the close air with a smell of warm milk, and a benighted glow-worm flits through the loft, she cowers down and thinks of a tiger breathing and staring at her with gleaming eyes. Ay, down there boys and girls are dancing and buying fairings, and pepper cakes baked in fantastic shapes, and chocolates and 'images' of 'the saint' stamped on wafers, and at the acting booths a lovely *meisje* with short skirts dotted with silver stars, and a glistening crown on her head, like the wooden Virgin in the village chapel, stands and invites one to enter with an engaging smile and wave of wand. Tink, tink, tink, clinks the bell-cow, springing with awkward leaps and high-swung tail to one side as a crowd of laughing *jonge jouvruiws* and '*sösterjes*' from the great pensionnat come down the road.

They are laughing and talking gaily, for the

A PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT 11

sisters are favourites and number many 'flames' amongst the crowd of girls filled with sickly sentiment, '*schwärmerei*', and awakening sexual instinct. They are genuinely in love. If their favourite leans over their shoulder to correct a theme, and happens to touch their arm, it calls forth a blushing disturbance in even the most stolid of the pupils. They colour quickly if she speaks to them suddenly, and touch furtively her scapular or the great cross at the end of her beads. Some of them cherish a scrap of her writing, and scramble for a flower she has carried in her hand, and if, on turning up the corner of her veil where her number is neatly marked in white silk letters, say 693, they are lucky enough to possess a number that will divide into it without remainder, it is a matter of ecstatic happiness.

They are on their way to the Kermesse, and the competition to walk next the sisters has been keen, and the cause of stratagems and heartaches. The sister in the rear musters her flock, turns her head quickly (some couples are straggling behind) and draws her straight brows sharply together under her snowy guimpe—a girl is talking to the little peasant, a disobedience without parallel.

'You must walk in front,' she calls sharply, 'and not two together, please.' Her eyes meet the amused look and scornful twist of lip of the girl who looks round at her voice, and who turns back coolly and slips something into the herd-girl's hand, and the latter, who has started tremblingly at the *sösterje's* voice, bobs her an awkward curtsey.

The girl is a tall anaemic-looking thing, but she carries her head well and steps along like a thoroughbred filly. The sister stands and waits with her satellites on each side ; but her eyes stay with the girl. The latter is too sharp-tongued, too keen-eyed, too intolerant of meanness and untruth to be a favourite with her classmates—too independent a thinker, with too dangerous an influence over weaker souls to find favour with the nuns.

' You must postpone your practice in flirtations, meine Fräulein ; join the ardent flames instead and burn at the shrine,' she says laughingly to the other girls as they move on.

Tête-a-têtes are strictly forbidden ; friendships are discouraged ; two girls seen together a few times are warned sharply, if necessary separated in all recreations. Perhaps this adds to the piquancy of a flirtation with a chum of one's own sex. A clasp of hand in the crush on the great staircase, an embrace in the golosh room, a billet-doux with sentimental verses and a Cupid with a dart-pierced heart or wreath of pink forget-me-nots are the usual result.

The worst trouble is with the girls from fourteen up ; if they fall in love with a 'sister' and become a flame, the matter is simple ; she will know how to blow hot and blow cold, and keep them where they are to remain. This girl will none of it.

She walks about with her hands clasped loosely behind her back ; and her sombre eyes dwell dreamily on the Dutch landscape.

They are bound for the little village of Gendringen, in Guelderland ; and as they draw nearer to it, the strains of instruments mingle with the desultory tink, tink of the cattle bells behind them. The little cowherd watches them disappear, with surprised light filling her eyes and a wondering smile playing round her lips, and a silver thaler, a thick bright wonderful coin clutched in her hand.

The sister watches the careless swinging step of the girl ahead with rising colour ; the ready scornful obedience, the indifference stings her. She draws out a little worn pocket-book and sets a mark against her name, Isabel, No. 7. The dowdily made convent gown of unbecoming material sits loosely on her unformed figure ; she has twisted a crimson scarf round her neck, and one end flutters and shakes its fringe over her shoulder like a note of defiance, thinks the sister. For to the subdued soul of this still young woman, who has disciplined thoughts and feelings and soul and body into a machine, in a habit, this girl is a *bonnet-rouge*, an unregenerate spirit, the embodiment of all that is dangerous, and never fails to call forth whatever of the narrowness and the small jealousy of the world still clings to the religieuse. She cries sharply :

‘ There is no need for you to walk alone, Isabel, because I tell you to comply with the rules.’

This time the girl shrugs her shoulders impatiently and slips her arm into that of a half-witted girl, Katrine, the daughter of rich Zeeland peasants—the butt of the finer Fräulein.

‘Will you have me, Trine?’ she asks with a confident smile. Trine’s dull eyes brighten and a slow mottled blush creeps up into the stupid face ; she admires the clever elder girl, who is so indifferent to blame and who has so often helped her with her hopeless French themes, in a dumb animal wondering way, and loves her passionately, for she is almost the only one who has ever given her a kind word. The girl smiles as she notes her pleasure, and draws her by skilful questioning into a stammering, delighted tale of her home life—the five hundred cows she will inherit and the gold coif and filigree ornaments, and the quaint customs at weddings and christenings.

The little village is irregularly built. A hideous white-washed church with stucco angels holding palm branches keeps one end of it. The streets are cobble-stoned and spotlessly clean, even the two trees that stand in front of each house of importance are hosed free from dust ; they are cut too in fantastic shapes, such as a lion-couchant, a griffin, or perhaps a teapot. One sister steps to the front, one to the rear, the flock in between. As they enter the village, the Burgomester, the notary, and the curate greet them. The latter is young ; his neat legs, set off to advantage by silk stockings and square-toed shoes with plated buckles, are a source of envy to such of the girls as are afflicted with thick ankles. There is a quaint crowd of peasants in holiday dress, but they seem subdued, and take their pleasure stolidly ; later on after dusk they will enliven to a coarser sort of merry-making.

The girls flit about in groups of ten, an enfant-de-Marie in charge of each, they flock round the booths like bees in search of honey, buying anything good to eat. They cluster at the roundabout with the fancifully painted pagoda and the tarnished trappings in the middle, its round of gaily painted steeds, as apocryphal as the unicorn, and its gaudily painted cars and gilded state coach to hold six. The sisters speak to the red-faced German who runs the show, and he cries lustily to the crowd at the entrance :

' All seats engaged for the next half hour ! All engaged ! '

And when the hurdy-gurdy and the bells stop, and the plebeian equestrians are dispersed, the young ladies clamber up and strive to sit gracefully in their saddles and lean back in the phaeton —glorious opportunities for being together.

Katrine looks wistfully on, and whispers pleadingly to her silent companion :

' Will you come with me, oh, won't you come ? '

' Would you like to '—with a smile—' well, get up then.'

' No, they wouldn't like me to.'

' Nonsense, go on ! ' She helps the great-hipped clumsy girl into a saddle, where she sits humped up in delighted expectation.

Two München girls, high spirited, stylishly dressed, come laughingly along in search of places.

' Get down, Trine, we want these horses, you look like a great toad.'

An obstinate piteous look clouds the girl's dull face.

'Do you hear? Get into the car instead.'

'Stay where you are, Trine. We want these horses,' cries the girl mounting the companion steed, a liver-coloured impossibility with flowing scarlet mane. 'You can get into the car instead!' with a malicious grin over her shoulder at the others. They flush and look disdainfully at the patched boot she is thrusting through the stirrups. It is their only means of retaliation, she has worsted them too often to risk an encounter of wits. The hurdy-gurdy in the pagoda strikes up a polka, well known through Holland and South Africa as 'Polly Witfoet,'—and with many preliminary creaks and strains the roundabout starts in a giddy circle

'Lal, lal, la, la ; lal, lal, la, la, lallallallalla.'

over and over again, and the gaudy tassels toss in the autumn breeze ; and the many-coloured manes and tails stream out ; and the pensionnaires giggle and scream and pretend to slip off ; and the great axle creaks and strains like a ship in the trough of a heavy sea, and the music seems to ring with the same feverish haste.

The girl's keen eyes note that at one point in the round, the breeze blows aside the trappings of the pagoda ; she peeps idly in, but each time after that her eyes seek it with a look of shrinking fascination. Her thin nostrils quiver, and her pupils dilate, and an indignant flush dyes her face in a beautiful way as she gazes—Why ?

An idiot lad is turning the handle of the hurdy-gurdy. He is fastened by a leathern strap round his middle to the pole in the centre of the tent.

A PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT 17

His head is abnormally large, the heavy eyelids lie half folded on the prominent eyeballs so that only the whites show, his damp hair clings to his temples and about his outstanding ears. His mouth gapes, and his long tongue lolls from side to side, the saliva forming little bubbles as the great head wags heavily as he grinds—indeed every part of his stunted, sweat-dripping body sways mechanically to the lively air of white-footed Polly.

‘Polly Witfoet, Polly Witfoet, lallallallallala !’

And the flags flutter, and the bells jangle, and the roundabout creaks, and the girls giggle and scream affectedly; all save two,—Trine, who is wrapped in a dull dream of pleasure, and her companion who is watching the boy, with ever-growing indignation and disgust swelling her breast, causing her to clench her thin hands.

Each time she looks, the heavy lids seem to droop more, the tongue to loll longer, the face to wax paler. Save for the strap the scarcely human form would topple over with weariness. A whip is leaning up against the frame-work.

‘Why should I see it ?’ she cries inwardly with passionate resentment, ‘why should I always pitch on the rotten spot in the fruit? Will the thing never stop? O my God, that poor wretch !’

She scans her schoolmates, laughing carelessly with their mouths filled with chocolates, ‘leckers,’ and kookjes; at the nuns with their spotless guimpes and their hands primly folded inside their long sleeves, and when she passes at the next round she shuts her eyes with a shiver.

'They don't see, they don't see,' she cries to herself. 'I alone see. My God, is that to be my fatal dowry, to go through life and always see? Oh, how I hate it! Made in God's likeness! Is that God's likeness, that poor, half-bestial thing with the lolling tongue and misshapen frame? Or that German with the bulbous nose and sensual lips who owns him, and perhaps uses the whip to goad him on!'

'Polly Witfoet, Polly Witfoet, lallallallallala !'

'Oh, stop! Will that wretched air never stop? Ha! ha! ha!'—with an hysterical laugh—'Oh, that poor creature! I am only seventeen, and is that what I shall find in the world to come—some poor idiot turning the organ for all the luckier born to dance——?'

The roundabout stops with a long-drawn groan, and they all dismount, and an eager throng of smaller girls struggle to get places. She clammers down on the inner side, and peers into the gaily-striped pagoda. He has laid down his monstrous shock-head on top of the hurdy-gurdy, and is drawing his breath in hard, shuddering gasps; but the swollen hand with the knotted fingers still grips the handle with a convulsive tension, ready to grind again.

She flees from the spot, forcing a passage through a slit in the canvas tent, and almost runs through the street of the prim little village; flees up the dusty road, utterly reckless of the penalty in store for leaving the nuns.

She throws herself breathlessly down at the foot

A PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT 19

of a great tree, and bursts into tears, not sorrowful tears, but heaving, rebellious sobs against the All-Father for His ordering of things here below.

'Oh, that poor thing ! that poor thing ! You needn't have made him ; God, I tell you, you needn't have made him ! You knew from all time he 'd be there, and why should he be ? Why should he grind music for all those selfish brutes to ride ? Oh ! oh ! oh ! why should he ?' She bruises her poor little clenched fist against the gnarled roots as she emphasises her words, and shakes it up at the silent sky, with the featherets of delicate lemon relieving the grey, the silent sky—that is always dumb.

'Oh, poor thing, poor thing ! I wanted to love you, God ; indeed, you know I did, but I can't, I can't, I can't. I love all those poor things of your creation far more, and oh, I hate to live ! I don't want to—always I see the pain, the sorrow, underneath the music—and I tell you—with a burst of passion—'if I were a great queen I would build a new tower of Babel with a monster search-light to show up all the dark places of your monstrous creation. I would raise a crusade for the service of the suffering, the liberation of the idiots who grind the music for the world to dance——'

She lays her hot, tear-stained cheek to the cool lap of Mother Earth, and the slender girl-frame shakes with deep-breathed sobs, and away from the tent under the shadow of the spire that points like a futile finger upwards, the tender breeze comes rustling through the jaundiced foliage, and

scatters the dying leaves like golden butterflies
that bear no message, bringing the refrain of the
common tune :

'Polly Witfoet, Polly Witfoet, lallallallallala !'

III.—THE WOMAN

LONDON that is west of Piccadilly Circus is virtually empty ; town looks jaded ; the very mansions wear a day-after-the-fête air. The men who look some way so effete, so weak-kneed in their town dress, have gone to shoot grouse or lure a salmon, gone in obedience to the only honest passion left in them—the lust to kill. The stalls in such theatres as are open have a show of soiled frocks, and the jaded young women of the big shops grow paler in the chaos of the autumn sales.

A man came out of the National Conservative Club and stood in the doorway, drawing his hand slowly through his beard. He was evidently weighing a question of some moment, for an acquaintance sauntering by greeted him with a jovial 'How are you ?' (he was Irish), and a fellow-member, likewise an acquaintance, passing in, uttered a stereotyped 'How d'ye do ?' (he was English), without eliciting a responsive look or greeting. At length he raises his head and looks about him. A lady is passing with two children, pretty, blue-eyed, golden-locked, well-kept little ones. One of them looks up at the big man as she trips sedately by, and a smile lurks

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in her eyes and dimples her cheeks. His face changes, and an irresolute expression crosses it. The spirit of evil that hovers round men and their destinies nearly loses her game, but she calls a quean to her aid, and saves it by the odd trick. The man's eyes with their softened expression are following the child, when a high-heeled French boot, with a liberal display of silk-covered calf above it, stepping on to the kerbstone attracts him. He looks up the figure and stops at the head of its owner. Her hair glistens metallically in the autumn sunlight, and her blue eyes throw him a challenge through their blackened lashes. He repays it with interest, and winks insolently as she tosses him a second glance over her shoulder. The cynical hardness returns to his face stronger than before, and he hails a passing hansom.

'British Museum!' He tilts his hat over his eyes and leans back, but he evidently wavers still, for he pulls out some loose money, and, selecting a sovereign, thrusts back the rest.

'Heads I do, tails I don't!' he mutters, and he spins it up and catches it on his open palm, and covers it with his left hand. The diamond in his ring seems to sparkle with a mocking light, like the eye of the jade who went by, he thinks. He lifts his hand—her Gracious Majesty the Empress of India in ugly Jubilee presentment! Who can say if he were not sorry? His face looks darker, and a more cynical smile flits over it, a tribute to the spirit of evil and the chance that favours his game.

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About the same time as the man left his club, a girl sitting at a desk near 'dictionary corner' in the reading-room of the British Museum looks up at the clock. A shadow of some emotion difficult to define waves across her face and leaves her paler. She takes up two books, mounts the step-ladder and replaces them reluctantly on the top shelf; puts on her hat, takes her gloves and some copy-books, and walks slowly out of the great room. When she reaches the door she turns and stands there, an unconsciously pathetic figure. She takes a long look—why? She does not know herself. She looks up at the great dome, at the tiers of books circling one above the other, the strange medley of men and women, and the skull-capped head of her favourite official. She has a kind of affectionate feeling for the great room; it has been her oasis in a vast desert. There she has forgotten the cravings of physical hunger and soul thirst; struggles, weariness, almost despair. She has found strong meat and perennial springs from which to draw nourishment; has mixed with a right goodly company of the wittiest and best of dead men and women. She has laughed over poor Dick Steele's letters to his dear Prue; envied Rahel the rare charm that held her young husband a lover always; visited Heine with La Mouche—forgotten her lack of living acquaintances in the richer companionship of her dead friends. The tears fill her eyes as the door swings behind her, and she draws on her gloves sadly as she goes out. She turns to the left and goes

through the King's Library—she has a fancy to circle the ground-floor. But to-day she walks on with drooping head ; she never glances at the quaint books of the Virgin in the cases, nor the rare samples of the forgotten art of binding. She goes up the stairs wearily and down again, and stops at the entrance to the Egyptian Room ; she looks up at the head of her friend Rhameses.

She has a peculiar fondness—nay, more, a close sympathy—with this old-time monarch of unforgettable features, with the thin curving lips and inscrutable smile lurking perpetually on his face.

She knows naught of him nor his dynasty, but she always says that he has whispered many wise things to her. Sometimes when the burden of life has pressed heavier than usual upon her frail shoulders, she has gone and sat down on the wooden bench and looked up to him for counsel. He has seen so much, looked down on so many races, well he may sneer at the struggling toil of the earth-ants that crawl over God's great dust-heap in futile effort to leave a lasting mark to make themselves known to posterity. 'You know it all,' she used to whisper, nodding up to him ; 'what do you teach me ? Endurance ! To meet the world with a granite face and a baffling smile, and smile always, come bad come good ; and when all is done lay my own speck of dust on the heap for another speck of dust to stumble over.' She smiles up to him with moisture dimming the soft bird-like brightness of her questioning eyes, and walks down the long room. Its very size is a

delight to her, and she halts before the perfect little black Apollo with the white eyeballs. He always responds to some artistic sense in her ; perhaps her art inclines to originality of expression ; she has at least no standards, she likes what she likes. She was much astonished once when some one told her that she was plagiarising Mr. Ruskin, when she said that Moroni's tailor was her ideal portrait—indeed he was the only tailor she ever pined to know. But she astonished her informant equally when she dared to say that she disagreed with the great authority on many points ; and that, besides, her own liking or non-loving was the only criticism worth a doit to her. She has found life a hard battle, but there have been beautiful books and beautiful pictures to worthen it, and, best of all, a free spirit and a free heart to fight the demons ; but now, perhaps—for she has a strange fore-feeling that she is singing the swan-song of her peace of soul, as she stands and takes a last look—now, perhaps, she is to go into bondage. A legend of the Finn gypsies flits across her memory. A true spirit dwelleth in the sun. Every child-girl can look up at it until she counts twelve summers, a few later. They can stare right into the glowing heart of the mid-day sun in search of the God-spirit without blenching, for they are white in soul ; but as soon as they lose their innocence, as soon as they learn the mystery of life [that men call sin, they lose the power, and when they try to see him they are blinded and tear-drenched by his fierce rays. A

queer legend with a deep meaning. Ay, she has been able to look each man and woman in God's world in the face ; heart and soul have been free and untrammelled as a gypsy child's ; and what awaits her to-day ?

She cannot shake off the dread feeling of an evil destiny drawing near to punish her for the pride in herself that has kept her steps light to carry her over the muddy places. She rises wearily to her feet and goes out ; the pigeons flutter aside from her path, and, as she avoids treading on the joins in the flagged path, another great yard rises before her visual memory, and she looks down.

Ay, there is the curl of orange-peel and the crumpled paper, but something is lacking—she tries to recall it—what can it be ? Ah ! a bit of pencil ! As she steps out through the entrance-gate a hansom pulls up with a jerk, and he advances to meet her. She has something in each hand, perhaps purposely. The driver notes her shabby serge gown, and the little patched shoe that shows beneath it, and looks for some startling set-off in the way of face or figure ; but they are not of the kind to strike the common eye.

They turn up Bedford Place and walk silently on. He watches her face through his half-closed lids.

' Well ! ' he says, ' you are not very communicative.'

An underlying threat lurks in his tone ; she feels it and flushes.

' There is not anything to say that I have not said before.'

'Indeed! You might, for instance, say that you are glad to see me—that it is awfully good of me to fag up to this beastly God-forsaken hole when I might be cruising round the Isle of Wight. You don't think you could bring yourself to tell even the conventional fib, eh?'

'Why should I? I have told you as often what I *do* think as I have begged you to let me be. One is as useless as the other,' with a touch of weariness.

They have reached Tavistock Square; a nurse-maid has just come out. He winks at her and slips her a florin; she unlocks the gate again; the place is almost deserted. He chooses a seat sheltered by some shrubs, and sits down. Clasping his hands on the top of his stick, he watches her with a strange mingling of affection and dogged determination.

'You look ill, thinner, more hungry-looking than when I saw you last, you obstinate little devil!'

'I am all right, if you would but let me be.'

'And that is just what I can't do; I want you, little woman, I want you more than anything else in the whole world; I'd let everything else slide for a soft word from you.'

'Which you have no right either to give or demand.'

'Oh, for the Lord's sake, don't harp on that string again. You've told me all that before. I am married, very much married, I owe all to my wife, etc. etc. Let us stick to facts—the great fact—you! If you only knew how much good you might do me, what an influence you have over me, how straight you could keep me. But you are like

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all the rest of your sex, selfish to the heart's core. You'd let a man go to perdition before you'd sacrifice an iota of your infernal purity—let him blow his brains out, because you hold your good name more worth than a man's life. Your good name, ha! ha! Who knows anything about you, or what are you to speak of? Take your own people; in a few years the young ones will be grown up and not care a merry damn about you, and as for your——'

She checks him by the passionate ring in her low voice, with its singularly clear enunciation :

'Leave them alone! What they are to me, or I to them, you are the last person in the world able to judge. I doubt if you ever had a clear unselfish feeling in your life. Say what you will to me, but leave them be'—with passion—'I won't bear it!'

'How you love them! And I have tried every way with you, coaxed as no mortal man ever coaxed before, bribed you all I know—it only remains to threaten you.'

She looks at him steadily; there is stinging contempt in her tone :

'I expected that from your letter; indeed I might have expected something of that kind from you in any case.'

'You drive me to it. I have tried to overcome your scruples—I have studied your wishes, endeavoured to meet you half way——'

'There is no half way for a woman. There is one straight, clean road marked out for her, and every by-road is shame. Grant that it is absurd

that it is so, that does not help her. She has to walk that one way unless she is prepared to give every man and woman a right to throw a stone at her ; and history tells us they don't stay their hands. I am putting it on the very lowest grounds ; you —with a fine scorn—‘would fail to grasp a higher argument for her virtue.’

‘Pah ! No one need know anything about it. I'll buy you a little place ; make it over by deed of gift ; or you can go and study abroad. I'll settle so much on you. I can always make an excuse to get away. You could see your dear home-folk just the same. I won't say anything for my own sake ; and who will be the wiser ?’

‘I would !’ Her eyes are blazing and her voice is beyond her control. ‘Do you think, if I consent, if I am forced for some reason to go with you, that I would do that ? Do you think I would lead a double life of lies, that I would make living a pretence of goodness ? Go home and tell them fancied tales of my life, kiss them —with a choked sob—‘buy them with your money the trifles I take them now out of my earnings, look into their eyes, hear them tell me —the tears are hanging on the ends of her lashes—‘I am good and brave and dear, feel how proud they are of me, and know in my heart that I was a thing not fit for them to touch ; play a part, lie with eyes and lips and life ? No, rather sever every connection with them by one sharp blow ; die to them at once and trust to their love and mercy to judge me in the after time.’

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'Pshaw ! heroics ! You'd make a capital emotional actress ; wonder you never tried it.'

There is a long silence.

'Well, now that you have cooled down a bit, what is your final say ?'

'Great God, I tell you I won't ! I can't ! Oh leave me be, do leave me be !'

'Yes, you can, little woman ; or rather, yes you must, and you know it. You are no fool, you err rather on the side of brains. You know that if you had dared you would have refused to meet me long ago, but your intuition told you I had a card in reserve, a trump card to play when you drove me too far, and now I am going to show it to you.'

He is opening a pocket-book.

'Show it to you, do you understand ? not such a fool as to let you get it between your little brown hands, ha ! ha !'

He takes out a letter ; it is a little soiled. She is very white and scarcely draws her breath ; once she looks at him, and her eyes are kindled with a deadly hate. He points to the name of the receiver and to the signature. He holds it so that she can read it, opens it ; there is a soiled, crumpled receipt in acknowledgment of money pinned inside. She reads with whitening face ; a hurdy-gurdy outside the railings is grinding out

'Polly Witfoet, Polly Witfoet, lallallallallala !'

She starts, knitting her brows in vain endeavour to find what the tune brings back to her.

'Well !' he says, 'have you seen enough ? I have a few more letters from the same hand. Now,

if I know you as I fancy I do, you will count any individual shame—mind that is your own term for it—as a small thing in comparison with the disgrace that will fall if I take any step about this little matter'—he is putting it carefully back—‘and you will come !’

The wind rustles through the trees and scatters a shower of tinted leaves over them. They flutter on to her tightly-locked hands and shabby little hat, and rest on her lap like flecks of blood ; and a great cry rises up in her breast of rebellion against the Creator of men. If she could only steal away to some quiet wood and lie down and die ! let the brown leaves, with their deep stains, blood stains, cover her gently and hide her for ever ! Surely it would not be very hard to die ? She has often felt her heart beat, she knows exactly where it is, a good long hat-pin would reach it.

He is watching her face intently.

‘ You are just in a mood to shoot me, or put an end to yourself, where’s the good ? You force me to be hard to you. You can’t escape. I swore to have you. “ All means are fair in ——.” You know the rest. If you put an end to yourself, I’ll put this thing through, so help me God I will. You may as well give in. I’ll make arrangements to go abroad, as your sensitiveness revolts against the more sensible arrangement and courts a scandal. I’ll let you know.’ He gets up and some remnant of remorse stirs in him. He is angry, not with himself but with her for forcing him to speak and act as he has done. She is very pale, and her

step is heavier than when she flitted through the museum ; something buoyant has left her. She droops her head as she walks, she will never carry it in quite the old way again ; insolently the women called it who disliked her, but it was the insolence of fearless integrity. He is sorry for her, and, now that he has gained the point he has been striving for, for the best part of a year, a little gnawing worm of a doubt begins to worry. Is it worth it all ? Shall he let her off ? Be bested by a woman ? And this particular woman, whose love or liking he cannot gain, and whose affection he fancies he craves for more than that of any one he has ever known ? No, he 'll be hanged if he will. Kismet ! it is written. And the hurdy gurdy grinds on white-footed Polly's polka.

He who has not seen Paris in May has not seen *la belle* in her freshest and prettiest guise ; lilac-scented, and flower-crowned, with a fragrant chestnut spike for a sceptre. Late one afternoon in this sweetest of months, the girl of the foregoing scene enters a private sitting-room in an hotel in the Rue de Rivoli. It is a drawing-room furnished in modified Louis quinze style. She has come in from a long drive in the Bois, and she who used to notice external things so closely has lain back in the hotel carriage, and let the vehicles with their freight of pretty occupants, parisiennes, in all the freshness of dainty spring toilettes, the bonnes, the flâneurs, on the pathway, all the radiant glad crowd in whom the sensuous witchery of spring is

working insidiously, pass her by, a blur of motion and colour, as a stage scene may appear to a short-sighted person. She throws her bonnet, gloves, and the parasol with dainty enamel and gold handle on to a couch, and sitting down in a chair at the window, closes her eyes wearily.

She has changed greatly in the between time. After all is said and done there is a great excuse for women's craze for dress. There is no beauty, except the beauty of absolute nude perfection that is not enhanced by it. Wholly beautiful women are rare things, but a woman who knows how to accentuate her good points and tone down her defects by skilful blending of colours and choice of material may pass as a beauty all her days, may exact the homage of the sons of men, and excite the envy of the daughters ; and is not this the salt of existence to many? To students of character she would have been at any time attractive ; now she would hold the eyes of men of commoner stamp. She looks a personage. She is a finished study in the art of taste in dress, and she is one of the women who pay for the trouble ; it is impossible to vulgarise her.

There is an expression in her eyes and set of mouth that was not there when she stood and bade good-bye, with a touch of humoursome sadness, to her friend Rhameses. She has passed through her ordeal by fire, and the sear of the iron is there in ineffaceable traces. In repose her face is a mask to the inner woman, one would be loth to disturb it ; there is something unapproachable

about her. Sitting there motionless, a casual observer would say she is asleep, a nicer one would note how ever and again the delicate brows contract in thought. He was as astonished and proud of the transformation clothes effected in her outwardly, as disappointed at their effect on her inner self. She chose the right things in obedience to an innate sense of beauty and fitness, and wore them with the same ease as her old serge frock.

She accepted everything with the same irritating indifference. It stung him into efforts to impress her, with the disconcerting result that she made him feel underbred. She left him no fault to find, the things that irritated him most in her were rather praiseworthy than otherwise. She might have filled the position of a legitimate duchess, but as a mistress she was not amusing.

She remarked that some jewellery he brought her was vulgar, palais-royal, suitable for a cocotte. He took it back, and she evaded choosing any other on a plea of fatigue. She found fault with an *omelette au chasseur* at the Maison Dorée, and he had to allow she was right. She remarked, in reply to his taunting query as to where she got her fastidiousness, that a course of tea-dinners in aërated-bread shops did not necessarily blunt one's palate or deprave one's discriminate appreciation in finer feeding. He was forced to acknowledge that a man may pay too dearly for having his own way.

Once only she had made what he called 'a scene'; it was at St. Raphael. An American family, pleasant cultured people of the kind one meets

seldomer in Europe than America itself, were staying at another hotel. They took a fancy to her. She touched on general subjects in such a bright individual way, with a passing gleam of humour, that it made her remarks worth listening to. But she avoided them when possible, especially the daughters. They put it down to 'inherited side' rather than a phase of individual temperament, and persisted in seeking her. They made up a party to visit the old Roman remains in the neighbourhood, and he desired her to join it. The American man 'knew a thing or two' about solid investments in western mortgages, and was worth cultivating. She refused point blank; commands and threats alike failed to move her, and she ended the discussion by saying: 'You can make what excuse you will. I made no bargain to deceive any one, and I will not go. I have tried to avoid them; when that was not possible I have been as pleasant as it is left in my nature to be. If you send her up to persuade me I shall simply say, "Madam, I am not this man's wife, I am his mistress." Do you think then she will be anxious to continue the acquaintance?' He struck her on the side of the face, and he excused her on the score of migraine.

Late in the evening their high-pitched laughing voices, and the odd drawl that fits itself so well to a smart saying, rang up to her from the gardens below. They sent her a fragrant tangle of flowers with pretty regrets for her absence. She laid them gently aside.

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She is kneeling at the open window, gazing out over the rustling woods and the white châteaux with the gaily striped awnings at the long windows; the thread of river, where the women bathe the linen, and gossip in voluble tones, winding its way to the quick sea.

What are *they* doing, who are never out of her thoughts? How do they think of her? Have they taken her photo out of the prettiest frame in the shabby old room, with the untidy litter of writing materials and paint brushes? She can see every detail in it: Molly's old work-basket, with the frayed silken lining, and the pile of cheap socks that work into holes so quickly. They are in the midst of fogs, and she is surrounded by rose-tangled banks. Roses, ay! But the red spider gnaws at the rosebuds too. A rose bush they saw once comes back to her with a new meaning. She remembers how all the tender shoots were covered with the crawling cinnamon red insects, how they ate into the heart of the buds, how she had watered, syringed, and taken a delight in killing the nasty things, with their thread-like legs, because Molly felt sorry for the roses. How plainly she can see her, with her clear true eyes, odd tender face, and pathetic droop of mouth. She used always to take her flowers, only a few narcissi or golden 'daffys,' a pennyworth from the street corner; country thoughts astray in the vile streets of the modern Sodom. How she used to delight in them, talk to them, poor pretty things, as if they lived and understood! A fancy of hers

from child days, when she looked for elves in the bluebells, and never plucked the 'fairy fingers' for fear of the good people's pinches. And now, great God ! she is lost to them—ay, worse lost than if she were out there fathoms deep—smothered in the sand that the sea rolls in unceasingly. If she could only explain! but that she cannot ; only crawl in once, and lie down like a stray cur. Cats and dogs and waifs of all kinds always sought shelter with them, and shared their scanty hazard happy meals. Happy? No, no longer. They are surely miserable. That *she* has done ; but what is their misery to hers? She meets her teeth in her arm, it is a sort of relief to counteract the agony of her soul by a pang of physical pain. The mild evening breeze, the monotonous note of the sea, the shiver of leaf, scent of night-plants, all seem to accentuate her misery, to bite the picture of the well-known room, peopled with the beings who are more to her than all the world beside, into her heart, so that the smart of it is almost intolerable. She rocks herself to and fro, and then looking up into the vast purple canopy overhead, as if trying to pierce the gloom, she cries with sobs, 'Oh God ! Christ God ! if it be that in guise of a little mortal child you grew to manhood in the midst of poor suffering toiling humans, shared their poverty, saw their sins, their crimes, their mistakes ; if you were weary as they with the heat and toil of daily labour, surely you will understand and have pity on my poor ones ! Dear God-man ! you who laid your hand on the

head of the Magdalen in tender human pity, and forgave her because she loved much, help them ! Let them forget me, even if their forgetfulness add to my Gethsemane ! Oh, if there be any merit in anything I have ever done, I offer it up for them.'

And the leaves just rustle, rustle, and the sea croons on, and the great blue canopy stretches away impenetrably, and no voice answers the poor trembling words wrung out from the heart that is sore and torn with the strongest affection of her life, and she finds relief in merciful human tears, the first she has shed since she has left them.

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That night seems years ago, and the prayer echoes as the voice of a dead acquaintance. A knock at the door rouses her, and a German waiter enters with a card on a salver.

'Ze shentleman wish to speak with you, madame !'

MR. ALOYSIUS GONZAGA O'BRIEN.

7 Bachelor Walk, Dublin. 90 Marine Parade, Dalkey.

'Are you sure, Karl, that he asked to see me, not monsieur ?'

'Oh yes, madame, ze shentleman have seen monsieur zis mornin' in ze shmokin' room, it is madame he vish to ze !'

She controls a start of surprise.

'Well, show him up here, Karl, in five minutes.'

One of her presentiments has come to her. With the swift intuition that is almost second sight with some women, she knows the objects of his visit. She looks at the card again. It is characteristic

of Dublin, and a damning satire as a cognomen for the man who bears it. She knows that he is *his* man of business for Ireland. She has a difficult part to play, she must summon all her inwit to her aid, for he has not yet redeemed his promise to give her those fateful papers. She shivers, and her temples beat with hard quick throbs, but at his sharp knock she nerves herself to bid him 'come in' with steady voice. He enters with a swagger. He is not the man to see any need of deference to a woman for womanhood's sake, and surely not to one who is in an anomalous position. Now when he had the honour of an interview with the Countess of Derryguile about a lapsed tenancy, he was obsequiously prepared to kiss her ladyship's number seven shoe. And he could not do justice to her second best sherry, so eager was he to stammer 'yes, your ladyship' to every remark. But there was reason in that. She remains seated, inclines her head a little, and looks at him in a way that disconcerts Aloysius Gonzaga O'Brien, lineal descendant of Brian Boru, with the blood of Milesian kings in the remoter past, and of his grandfather the pawnbroker, and his grandmother the chandler's daughter, who died in the odour of sanctity and left one thousand pounds for masses, coursing through his veins in the nearer present. It arrests his familiar greeting ; it was not thus he had mapped out the scene when thinking of it.

'You wish to see me?' She has an uncomfortable way, at least so he feels, of letting her eyes rest on him ; a way that does not tend to set him

more at ease. ‘Won’t you sit down?’ pointing to a chair.

He draws one over to the table, and she notes the contrast between the chair with the delicate posies and fluttering love-knots of its brocade, and this man who twists his leg awkwardly round one of its dainty gilded legs. She notes his flushed porous skin, his heavy pink lids, half concealing eyes cunning as a hedge-hog’s, his fat jaw and gaping slit of a mouth with the protruding under-lip and slight red shade on his shaven chin. With the quick sensitiveness of perception of every Celt, he feels that her thought of him is unflattering, and he anathematizes her mentally in racy epithets gleaned in early days when he played ‘tip cat’ in Meath Street. Neither schooling at Tullabeg, the shades of the Four Courts, nor mixing in such polite society as his success in Dublin has procured for him has deprived him of the ugliest Dublin accent and a tendency to clip the ending of his words.

‘I suppose yer wonderin’ at my wantin’ to see ye. Well,’ as she makes no reply, ‘there’s no use batin’ about the bush, I might as well say I came over to Paris for that purpose. Ye know I transact a dale of business for Mr. St. Leger in Oireland, an’ I may say’—twisting a crested signet on his little finger—she wonders if it has three balls—‘I have his interest intoirely at heart.’

‘Of course, coupled with your own ; that is your business.’

'What's that?' She does not repeat it, only watches him calmly.

He flushes a deeper red: 'Well, as I waz sayin', I had an interview with her solicitors in London, an' she—they—we consulted and agreed I should try to see if we couldn't come to some arrangement. She is disposed, an' I think it very handsome of her, to overlook everything uv he goes back. Otherwise there'll be a divorce an' a scandal; an' so I came over.'

'Yes. But why to me? You saw Mr St. Leger!'

He looks at her curiously. Now, is she making a shrewd guess in order to trip him into an admission, or does she know? It is safer to distrust people always.

'Yes, I saw him about another matter, sure ye know, I had to make an excuse.' A face given to open expression does not readily change, and a gleam of comical disbelief waves over hers. It stings him, he raises his voice a little. 'Well, anyhow, ye know this business can't go on; it 'ud just be his ruin intoirely. Yer clever enough to see that. Just look at the facts. Suppose she divorces him and he marries you . . . well, he'd lose a power of money, an' you yerself wouldn't be much the better for it. *All the water in the Seine wouldn't wash ye white again, sure ye must know that!*'

She grows very pale, but otherwise she makes no sign, the same inscrutable expression that seems now to be a subtly blended part of her features

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gathers on her face. It flashes through her mind,—did she read it?—something about an act of parliament having been necessary to stamp an attorney a gentleman. It would take more than that to effect the apotheosis of Aloysius Gonzaga O'Brien. ‘That is rather an opinion for individual judgment, Mr. O'Brien. Surely it was not to tell me that, you came over to Paris. Would it not facilitate matters to come to the point?’

‘Oh, faith I've no objection,’ with an insolent laugh, ‘it's just how much will ye take?’

There is a long silence in the room; the sun stole in and lit up a group of porcelain Watteau shepherdesses and ogling swains on a cabinet behind him, so that it showed out in high relief, one distinct object in the swirling red confusion of all things that surged in her brain in the minutes that seemed so long to her. It brought her back to actual life; the simpering beaux and ridiculous Chloes with rose-ribboned crooks and rosetted hats on one side of their carefully coiffured heads strike her as a farcical note in a moment of tragedy, but never more will she be able to say: ‘I don't understand how any one can commit a murder.’

‘I am perhaps dense, but I must ask you to explain more clearly what you mean.’

There is a sharper note in her voice, and mistaking her paleness for fear he grows in insolence.

‘Oh thin, it's plain enough! They don't want any scandal, an' if ye just take a fixed sum an' sign a guarantee that neither you nor your people'll

come up after with an action for seduction or the like, the whole matter's settled straight off, an' there's no more to be said.'

'No, there's not much more to be said. Only I think it was *he* who authorised you to make that proposal to me, not her men of business, they would hardly have chosen you for an emissary!'

'Well, iv id was so, what is that to you? Ye know yer own position, an' if ye get, say, one thousand pounds, ye can't complain that ye didn't get divilish lucky out of id. Yer a clever woman wid a stoile of yer own, for them that likes it'—filling his eyes brutally with the grace of her figure—"an' there's many ways of starting in life wid a sum like that.' Deceived by her quiet, he continued with a leer: 'Ye might set up an—'

'An establishment in St. John's Wood perhaps?'

'Twas something like that I meant'

'You do my capabilities too much honour.'

She is fighting a brave fight, the nerve force that comes to her inexplicably in such times, making her strong as a man, stands to her. She rises and presses the electric bell. Karl answers it.

'Find monsieur, and say madame wishes to see him.'

She remains standing on the hearth, the logs are ready for lighting, and fir cones are mixed with them; she wonders if they come from the Ardennes; if little children in sabots laughed as they gleaned a resinous harvest, and if they too called them 'crows' prayer-books,' as she and her playmates did in childhood days, when the trees

and the flowers and the beasts had each a message and the world was a wonder world. He enters and exchanges a rapid look with the other man, who is obviously ill at ease.

'I cannot congratulate you,' she says, with smiling contempt, 'upon the finesse of your man of business. If I were you I should not employ him in future in affairs requiring delicate treatment—in which you didn't wish to be given away.'

He flushes, throws his half-smoked cigar into the grate, and tugs nervously at his beard. 'Eh? I don't—I don't quite—'

'Understand? I will explain to you. As far as *I* understand, your wife is anxious to smooth this over, and you yourself, having weighed the profit and loss, think it best to agree. That I expected; I knew it must come sooner or later. But I didn't expect you to employ a common cad to tell me so. Perhaps you think'—with a passionate catch in her voice—'with him, that it is now impossible to insult me. But knowing what he can't know, I think you ought to have chosen a different means of conveying your wishes, been a little nicer in your choice of an instrument. Was it by your orders that he informed me that not all the waters in the Seine will wash me white—suggested a comfortable course of genteel vice as a future to me? Or did you merely suggest the thousand pounds and cry quits?'

He turns from the gaze of her eyes that seem to pierce his soul and vents his discomfiture on his tool.

'Damn it, O'Brien, of all the thick-headed, infernal Irish asses, you——'

'You couldn't change the man's nature,' she interrupts. 'I have only one thing to say before I request Mr. O'Brien to leave the room, and that is, I make no terms—I require no bribe to buy me off, I am glad to go. You know why I came, and how ill you have kept your part of the bargain. Keep your promise, and you are free to leave me now if it suit you—but I touch no money of yours. I have no intention of sinking lower than you brought me in the eyes of conventional people, and you can be equally sure I shall not molest you. Bid him leave the room now, a few words will settle everything between you and me!'

Both men go out. He returns shortly; she has not stirred. He is vexed that she should have probed the truth; relieved at the prospect of parting; for she shames him daily, and her presence is a constant reproach. Virtues that would be tiresome in a wife are doubly so in a mistress! He strives to carry it off easily.

'You have a stinging tongue; O'Brien won't forget you in a hurry; I'll remind him of it when he shows an inclination to put on side.' He touches her hair in awkward attempt at a caress; he tells himself that he really was fond of her, but she wouldn't let him; she wouldn't be reasonable, all women are contrary devils.

'There's no use in saying I am sorry now, that I wish to God I could undo the thing, is there?'

'No; it won't undo it, will it?'

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He thrusts his hands into his pockets and tries to find an introduction to what he wants to say. He finds himself watching the toe of his patent boot instead. In despair he plunges boldly to the point.

'Look here. About this money. You've got to take it. I'll lodge it in Glyn's bank and you can draw it as you like.'

'That won't make any difference. I have never changed any you gave me yet. What I have will pay my way.'

'Where are you going? I suppose you have settled?'

'Why let that concern you? You can be sure I shall neither add to my own sense of shame, or your need for remorse. You need not fear. Neither I nor mine will give you trouble.'

'I know that. I told O'Brien so. But it seems such a queer wind-up—I meant it to be so different, 'pon my soul I did. Anyhow, stay till to-morrow morning for the look of the thing—I'll cross in the evening with him. Is there anything I can do—I—'

'Yes, one thing. You made me a promise when I came with you—I ask you to keep it now that we are going to end our—episode. Give me those papers!' She says it so quietly that he does not dream that she is almost faint with suspense. It stings him that she always harps on that, that no thought of him occupies her.

'Well, I don't mind,' taking out his pocket-book, 'now that we are going to cry quits, I may

as well let you have them. You paid rather a big price for it, eh?' He holds them high above her head and looks tantalisingly at her; things have gone more smoothly than he imagined; he is in good humour. 'Give me a kiss into the bargain; one of your own accord; you are not as generous with your gifts as I was with mine.'

It says much for her strength of will that she masters the hysterical desire that prompts her to scream. She looks up at him, nay, more, puts her arms up round his neck and kisses him with a wan smile. It crosses her mind that Delilah must have smiled that way. He hands her the papers, closing her other hand over them with a softened amused look. She folds them with trembling eager fingers into spills and, lighting the wax candles, holds them to the flame, watching them curl into grey black ash. She sears her nails and there is a smell of singed horn; she rubs the last bit of ash between her fingers and bursts into a laughing sob of relief. For the first time she realises how great and long the strain has been, and how racking a pain she has in her head.

He has been leaning back in a chair watching her with a flickering smile. 'Well, are you satisfied now?'

She cannot reply at once, the desire to laugh and cry at once is choking her.

'Yes, I am satisfied now. In a few hours I shall have looked upon your face for, I hope, the last time. I have been waiting for these or I should have gone long ago.'

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'You are a tenacious little devil! and so I have no hold more on you—I suppose you'll go in the morning?'

'I'll go in the morning!'

'Well, I'll leave the hotel the same time; I can leave my traps in the cloak room. Are you going to cross?'

'No; I am not going to England!'

'Haven't you,' he asks it with a kind of fierce impatience, 'one atom of regret? I haven't treated you badly whilst you have been with me, have I?'

She smiles her odd amused smile, but says nothing. He takes up his overcoat and goes to the door and hesitates; comes back and stands beside her:

'Well, Kismet! I'll go. I fancy you'll like that best. Won't you shake hands, little woman?'

She puts out her hand. 'Oh yes, and I wish you no ill.'

He looks at her regretfully and goes out, opens the door again and puts in his head, saying:

'I'll order dinner for you, and tell Karl to put up my things—and God bless you!' The door closes quickly, and so the every-day follows the tragedy, and dinners must be eaten even if lives are wrecked.

She has finished packing, and her travelling hat and cloak and bag lie ready waiting. She has declined dinner and ordered some tea; the tray with the pretty china is still on the table. She is flushed with the excited sense of relief that fills

her whole thought. She has made no plans as to where she will go or what she will eventually do. She has a well-defined idea as to the course of action that will guide her future life, but she has not studied details. The Finn legend occurs to her again. Well, she can no longer look fearlessly into the eyes of the day god ; there will always be a shrinking fear of hurt. All the blind faith in a beautiful future, the golden hopes that made climbing the hills such an easy task, have left her. Her dream of a White Knight waiting for her, if only she keep her spirit free and her heart clean, has been dispelled by her own action ; she has smirched her white robe : never more can she stand waiting to meet her knight with fearless glad eyes. Foolish fancies of a girl, perhaps, but the sweetest and best of life lies in its fancies. If it were not for them the dead weight of life would crush us in early youth. She utters her thoughts aloud, as if finding comfort in her own voice. She opens the long window and steps out into the balcony, and gazes out into the twilight, and up to the stars that shine faintly over the beautiful city. She is glad to be leaving it ; she has a strange sensation of breathing an unclean atmosphere in it. She wonders if it is peculiar to her. Sometimes men, women, even streets, affect her that way. She has often conceived a repugnance to the very houses in an unknown street, to the faces of the women peering out from the windows ; a loathing dread of the men who leered at her as they met her ; and if she asked, 'What is

such a street?' the answer would explain her feeling. Beds in hotels and places have sometimes disturbed her in the same way, so much so that she has started up and rolled herself in her rug and slept in an arm-chair, because the sense of evil thoughts that never come to her otherwise seem to impregnate her as if the very bed held them ; and she, highly sensitive as she is to the psychometrical influence of things, cannot but feel it. Paris, though it has been a dream of hers to visit it, to revel in the art treasures of the people of all dwellers on the globe most gifted with an artistic sense of the fitness of things, disturbs her in a curious way. She remembers how once in the private collection of an art connoisseur she came suddenly upon a tinted ivory Aphrodite, so perfect, so exquisite a piece of carving, that one could almost see the rounded bosom rise and fall with the breath that seemed to tremble through the parted lips ; the roseate tinge of toes and palms, the play of light, the warmth of shadow in the beautiful curve of back, quickened the ivory into throbbing life. She recalls this woman smiling through her half-closed lids under the shade of a modern hat cocked insolently upon the ripples of hair that crowned her classic head. She remembers the outraged feeling of shame that sent the blood rushing to her face as she realised for the first time how vile a thing false art could become. She has never forgotten the effect it had on her : the stained ivory, the beauty of the limbs, the marvellous reality of the curled feather, the

genius of the artist who debased his art to produce just a nude woman, an Aphrodite of the Boulevards. She has the same feeling here in this lovely city. It is as if she has a diabolical intuition of corruption underlying its beauty ; the men sipping absinthe outside the cafés inspire her with dislike ; the shifting green and opal changes of the liquid remind her of snakes' eyes, mocking *reflets* of ancient evil. She will seek some quiet sea village amongst a strange people, simple working people. She has an intense longing for a good sea-breeze, to blow away the atmosphere of the city. She feels so bruised, so shamed, and yet she asks herself, Why shame ? Is not that, too, a false conception based on custom ? No, not in her case. Her soul-soiling is not because she lived with him, but because she lived with him for a reason other than love—because it involved a wrong to another woman.

There is a knock at the door.

'Entrez !' she calls, stepping back into the room. A tall, massively-built woman comes in. She is a splendid creature, with deliberate, sensuous movements, of the type which has what is vulgarly called 'a fine presence.' A fur-trimmed cloak falling loosely back shows her black silk dinner gown ; it is cut square, and is an admirable setting for her handsome throat and neck, that is white with the whiteness of flesh peculiar to red-haired women. Her forehead is broad, dazzlingly white and unlined, and the masses of her hair are waved loosely back from it, and twisted with a

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burnished copper crown at the back of her broad head. Her heavily moulded face is unemotional, expressionless in its sullen calm ; the thin red lines of her lips droop at the corners, and her grey eyes look steadily, coldly out, with an air of weary inquiry.

The two women face one another, finished exponents of opposing types : one, insistent with nervous energy, psychic strength manifesting itself in every movement of her frail body, every fleeting expression on her changeful face ; the other, a model of physical development, with a face and eyes admirably adapted to conceal rather than reveal her feelings or passions.

She is about to tell her visitor that she has mistaken the room, when she is stayed by a feeling that such is not the case. Fleeting images of forgotten scenes cross and clash through her inner vision—out of the chaos recognition must come—an anaemic girl with drawling voice and Dublin accent—ah ! now she knows. She does not heed the outstretched hand, a large, soft hand, with fingers that curl back at the tips and a managing thumb, she only flushes painfully.

' You remember now,' says the other. Her voice is thin, flutelike, odd, coming from such a throat. ' I knew you at once ; you are too distinctive to change.'

' I did not at first, I could not place you ; it is a long time, and you have changed greatly.'

' Yes, in more than appearance.'

She makes no reply. She scarcely knows what

to say. Her position is a difficult one. She feels the grey eyes searching her face ; their owner puts an end to her perplexity, saying :

‘ May I sit down ? I saw you come in yesterday ; I was in the hall. I have been trying to see you ever since.’

‘ To see me ? ’ Now the release is near, the strain of the last months is telling on her ; she resents the intrusion. ‘ I think you would not if —— ’

‘ I knew, you mean ! You are not changed. But I do know, that is just why. O’Brien is a connection of my husband’s ; he told me why he came over here. Your—they have all three gone to some place, something rouge——’

‘ Moulin rouge ? ’

‘ Yes, that’s the place. I wanted to see you for myself.’

The girl looks at her with a touch of defiance, and her eyes burn sombrely. The remembrance of a letter received a few days before stings her anew. Is this to be part of her punishment ? Is every proper woman she ever knew to come and anoint her wound with well-meaning, bungling fingers, and advise her what ointment to employ ? No, a thousand times no ; she will stop it at once and for ever ! There is a new sharpness in her voice as she remarks :

‘ Under existing circumstances I am at a loss to know why. There can be but one reason—a kind intention on your part to persuade me to repentance. The day before yesterday I got this letter,’ she selects it from a heap of papers she has been

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sorting, and twists it in her feverish fingers, 'from Mary O'Mahony, you know, the Queen's counsel's wife. She enclosed a medal and an introduction to a convent where they receive Magdalens of a better class, with means enough, in fact, to indulge in genteel contrition. They find them occupation, and, I presume'—with bitterness—'white sheets to stand in. No doubt she meant it kindly ; but I fail to see why she or any other woman should stand in judgment over me. What can such a woman as Mary know of motives ? reared in a convent school, married at seventeen with absolutely no knowledge of life ; and who has spent her time ever since in nursing babies and going to missions, and never reads a book except under the direction of her father confessor. If you are actuated by any such motives, I beg you to spare yourself and spare me. You do not know my reasons, and I shall most certainly not explain them.'

There is silence ; the little timepiece chimes out ten silvery peals. She is standing near the fireplace ; the logs are glowing from red to white, and the fir-cones sputter and fill the room with an aromatic smell. She is very pale, her eyes seem sunken, and one expression chases the other with baffling quickness.

The woman in the chair is holding her face in the palm of one big white hand, resting her elbow on the table. Her eyes dwell on the other's face, and there is a soft wistfulness in their expression. The pupils are larger ; as a rule they narrow into a speck when she looks at any one. She says slowly :

' You are wrong then ; I had no such intention. I heard you were leaving to-morrow, and I wanted to see you. I have never forgotten you ; you were younger than I was, but you influenced me——'

The girl interrupts her incredulously : ' I ? '

' Yes, you. I never forgot that scene in the old school at Rathmines. I told you you were a fool, do you remember ? That was the outcome of home training ; in my own heart I envied you your courage. When O'Brien told us, I had heard a rumour about it before I left, I '—with hurried speech and softening rush of vowels—' I envied you. I envy you now, though I don't understand why you did it, or why you are going away from him. Yours isn't the face of a woman leaving a man for whom she has sacrificed all because she loved him ; I think you are glad. Maybe you wonder at the word I use, but I say it again, I envy you the self-reliance that gave you courage to do it—and courage to face life again after having done it—alone, as you mean to do. Sure, I could make two of you '—rising to her feet and stretching out her magnificently modelled arms, whilst her words trip one another with tremulous passion —' and I haven't a spark of your courage. I am a coward, just a soft thing beside you. I would give all I ever dreamt of to have it or your truth. I am a living lie, acting a lie daily, and even if I could, I wouldn't change it ; I am afraid of public opinion. Do you remember how you used to laugh at things and say : "Bother what people say" ? I used to study you and wonder if you really meant it, or if

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it was only for bravado's sake. You knew papa, and our home. You knew our life. We were scrupulous in the performance of religion, and bigoted to our souls' core ; we gave to charities, when there was a subscription-list in the papers, and slunk by our poor relations in trade. We toadied and slandered, and the biggest ambition we had in life was to move to Fitzwilliam Square, and be presented at the Castle. No snubbing was cutting enough to deter us from trying to attain it. Bah, you know so-called Dublin society better than I do ; you know girls who go year after year to the Drawing-Room in cotton-backed satin trains ; pinch and save at home to find dresses for dances ; walk Kingstown pier season after season and set their caps at every stray military man, and when their good looks are going and regiment has followed regiment without success, they fall back on an attorney at home with a decent practice, and pretend they loved him all the time. We are no better than the rest ; you made me think first ; I used to want to write to you, but mamma discouraged it—you were not well enough off to make it worth while. Papa got on well ; he stood in with the Cardinal in politics, and didn't offend the other party. When I was twenty I went to an aunt in Liverpool ; she had money. There I met the man I cared for. He was only first officer on board a steamer, and a Protestant into the bargain. I was very happy as long as it lasted ; but he wrote home and my father came and fetched me, and I was bundled back as if I were a girl of twelve;

sent to Rathfarnan Convent on a visit (it was Retreat week), and I hadn't courage to rebel. Nuns and priests and family clutched at me as if I was a lost soul ; you would have laughed at it, but I had not read or thought then as I have since, to quiet my misery. A Protestant of no family and no means, a heretic who couldn't buy a dispensation to marry in this life, and was bound to peril my soul and certainly lose his own in the next. Is there such fanatical bigotry anywhere under the name of religion as with us ? And sure I knew so well that if he had money or high county connections, they'd have jumped at him, ay, even if he had been a fire-worshipper. I used to think of you sometimes, I was so lonely, and I knew so well what you would have done. He wrote to me, and after that my mother stayed home from Mass to open his letters whilst I was out of the way. Then he came over, and she never left me alone a second with him ; and he was going out to Brazil. Then I got courage, and I wrote to him myself, but I never got an answer. I know since ; it was stopped.'

How the woman is changed ; her grey eyes are gleaming with light, and her great white chest is heaving with a passion of resentment.

' Papa and mamma and the priests made up a match, and I was married to a man I detested and detest still. But all Catholic Dublin came to the Cathedral ; I have never put my foot in it since. The Cardinal married us, and there were seven priests at the sacrifice, and the nuns sent me pious

congratulations and a crochet quilt. It made me sick of the very form of religion, of life, of everything. I hate their shams and the snobbery of the people I meet, but what could I do? Two years ago my aunt left me her money. There is great power in money to a woman, and I knew more than before—I knew how to use it. The marriage laws as to separate property for women in Ireland are as good as void, because few women care to insist on them. The priests don't encourage independence in women; when they lose this hold on them they'll lose their hold on humanity. A farmer's wife in country parts of Ireland would find it difficult to lodge or draw money without her husband's signature, the fools! And no Zulu strikes a harder bargain for cows with his prospective father-in-law than the average Irishman for the girl's dowry. They are huckstered and traded for, and matches made up for them, just the same as they bargain for heifers at a fair. The fortune is handed over to the husband to use as he pleases, and the priests get an ample percentage on it. I made it understood that no penny of mine would go out of my keeping. I refused to share in any dealings. I am a good business woman now. My babies died, and at my death neither family nor husband nor church 'll benefit; every penny of it will go to him or his. That's my satisfaction. My case is not an uncommon one in Ireland. Most of the women find their consolation in piety, and a few in drink, and neither stops a mortal heartache.'

She has dropped into her seat again, and, lean-

ing down her head on her arms, begins to cry with deep, quiet sobs. The girl goes over ; she has not once interrupted her passionate torrent of words. She smoothes the thick hair that waves so richly up from the white neck. It strikes her that there are some very handsome things about this woman as she lies there with her face concealed, and only her quivering white throat and grand heaving shoulders, and little pink ears, that sit so prettily to her head, visible.

' Poor thing, poor big woman, perhaps you will feel better now that you have told some one. I think you came to me because you thought that I too loved as you do, and that I had courage to put all aside for it. I do not know if I would'—gravely—'I have never been tried. It was not for that. Why, it concerns no one to know ; excuses and apologies are always a mistake. The best is to bear bravely the consequences of one's acts ; that is the only way to spare others from suffering for them. Ssh ! there, there, don't sob so ! Don't ! Did you think I could help you perhaps ?'

The red-crowned head bows in assent.

' I am afraid I know of no silver slippers to walk the thorny way. My own doctrine is a hard one. Endure, simply endure. Forget yourself, live as much as you can for others, get a purchase of your own soul some way, let no fate beat you. In a few years what will it all matter?—not one cent, whether you have loved or been loved, been happy or unhappy. We have all got to thole our assize of pain. Perhaps everything is for the best, though

one can't see it. Just think ! Is not my lot a harder one than yours? Remember, for all my life to come I have to carry the loathing of one portion of it with me ; it will sour the bread and bitter the drink of all my days. But I will not let it beat me for all that. I would not talk of myself to you now but that it may be in hard hours to come you will, as you say you have done in the past, think of me ; and it may help you to forget your own fate to realise another's harder one.'

The older woman looks up out of her red-rimmed eyes at the grave face, with its strange half smile, of the younger, and smoothes the slim hand between her large ones ; she does it awkwardly as if caressing is rare to her fingers.

'I have always thought that each man or woman should bear as far as possible the entire effect of his mistakes or sins. It used to be a fancy of mine that if I were unfortunate enough to bring an illegitimate child into the world I would never disown it or put it away. I suppose it is my lack of orthodox belief which makes me unable to see that a bastard is less the fruit of a man and woman's mating than the child of a marriage blessed by priest or parson. To my poor woman's logic the words of the clergy have nothing to do with the begetting. I know men think differently ; they don't seem to realise that their physical and mental peculiarities, their likeness, body and soul, is stamped on the one as well as on the other. They rarely give them so much as a thought, at best seven shillings a week. And yet they will strive

and toil, love, ay, sin, for the puniest specimen of humanity assigned to them by religion and law. If I had such a child'—with a lightening of eyes—"I would call it mine before the whole world and tack no Mrs. to my name either. I would work for it, train it up to respect and love me, explain to it, as soon as it had understanding enough to grasp my meaning, the wrong I had done it in men's eyes, teach it to bear its part bravely in the world, and hold its head high amongst men, to laugh at the want-wit inconsistency that forgives the man that begat the brat and treats with pitiless scorn the helpless result of his fathering. It is an unwritten law of society that the woman who strays from the narrow path assigned to her shall never walk again in the way of honour. And if nowadays she has no scarlet letter tacked to her gown to mark her from her sisters she is none the less doomed. Doomed to choose between two roads. Either she must be a hypocrite and play the penitent Magdalen and be driven to despair by the sanctimonious pity of zealous women of second-rate virtues and untempted honour or . . . Believe me, the Magdalen at Christ's feet had an easy road to repentance. But think of the poor soul who tells her sins to His vicar on earth or his wife. Think of the dismal platitudes tintured with the world's opinions, the exhortations to repentance pointed with a hint to keep her place as a sinner. If she is of the kind to rebel at the dreary road Christian charity indicates to her, she is free to seek the broad road to destruction as a pleasanter alter-

native. She is a prey to every man who thinks she has given him a pre-emptive right to her person, a target for every woman to shoot at with arrows dipped in the venom the best of them have in their nature.

' You look questioningly at me? Your eyes query which road I shall take; why should I tell you, why should I talk to you at all? I seek pity, help, friendship from no one. And yet because you understand me well enough to offer me nothing but simply to come to me as a woman to a sister woman, I will tell you. I shall take neither. I shall apologise to no man, court no woman's friendship, simply stand by my own action, and I defy them to down me, and that is what I would teach every woman.'

' Is it true you refused to accept any——?'

' Terms? Yes, it is true. Do you think I fear? Not one whit. No power on earth, no social law, written or unwritten, is strong enough to make me tread a path on which I do not willingly set my own foot. The world owes every man born into it bread, and no more; no man need starve, but the hungry man or woman must buy his bread at the world's terms—work. I cannot demand the place I would have sought in it before; my character or want of it, *comme vous voulez*, is against me; but I can get a living and I mean to. I know more than the average woman, ay, more than the average man; and I have intuition—he hasn't. My fingers are as deft at woman's work as the most conventional jade's who ever trimmed a

bonnet. I can do most things I try to. I never yet met ten men or women together without finding that five of them either knew less or were weaker in will or personal magnetism than I am. *Those five will give me a living.* I shall get it honestly, give them more for their money than any one else, and when it is a question of value to be received, believe me, the character of the giver is of mighty little consequence to those who are the gainers. That is the story of the world. There is no power strong enough to crush a man or woman determined to get on, or who knows how to die if needs be. It is a stale truism that nothing succeeds like success.'

'But that is all so hard, dear; don't you want to be happy?'

She smiles sadly back to the tear-drenched grey eyes with their look of pitiful questioning.

'Happy, what is happiness? The most futile of all our dreams, the pursuit of a shadow, the legacy of a forgotten existence bequeathed as a curse to lure men from peace to despair. The nearest approach to it is absolute negation of self, to think, work, live for others round each day as if one is to close one's eyes at night for the last time. Life is far too short, dear woman, to run after happiness. Stand on your own feet, be a burden to no man, find your work and do it with all the might of your being, and men will give you a full measure because you neither need nor ask it of them, for that is their nature. Do you know I don't think people realise how much of the world

belongs to them. All that has been written, or said, or sung, or lived, has been lived for us of to-day. It is ours. No monarch yet has been powerful enough to hold a monopoly of a sunshine, of the varying beauty of the seasons, the sheen of moonlight on rippling water, the stain on the leaves at fall-time, the dappling shadows in the woods, the laughter of little children. All that is best, and strongest, and most beautiful, because most love-worthy—smiling triumphantly—‘in the world is a common inheritance, and I mean to take my share of it. The world is full of pictures that no Czar can confine to a gallery, full of unwritten comedy with the smiles trembling in the balance, with the tears and tragedies deeper than any ever staged by managing mummer. If men are miserable it’s because they pursue the shadow and leave the substance, run like the old crone in the fairy tale all round the world in search of the sunshine instead of opening the windows of their souls to let it in. We are all so busy building up wretched little altars to hold the shabby gods of our devotion, that our years pass away and we are laid to rest without ever having tasted life for the span of a day. No Russian peasant bows more humbly to his ikon than does the average man and woman to the mangy idols of respectability, social distinctions, mediocre talent with its self-advertisement and cheap popularity. Great God! think how many miss a glorious sunset they might see from the doorstep because it is genteeler to peep over the window-screen! I wish I could

start a crusade and preach a new gospel to all my weaker brethren, who have suffered and sinned and are being driven to despair for the sake of their pasts. I would make them arise with renewed hope; teach them to laugh in the faces of the hackneyed opinion of the compact majority who are always wrong; stir them to joy of living again; point out to them well-springs of wisdom and love, that no speculator on the world's change has power to make a corner in; prove to them that the world is to each of us if we have canning, or cunning, enough to take our share of it; and that when all is said and done there is no particular kind of maggot to feed on the king any more than the peasant.'

Her voice has dropped to a whisper. She has been clothing the thoughts of months into words and she has completely forgotten her audience of one. The latter is looking at her with eager eyes and parted lips, and when the girl, roused from her thoughts, smiles at her, she draws her down and holds the throbbing head to her heart.

'You see,' she says, lifting her head, 'I can't help you. You must find yourself. All the systems of philosophy or treatises of moral science, all the religious codes devised by the imagination of men will not save you—*always you must come back to yourself*. That is your problem, and one which you must solve alone. You've got to get a purchase on your own soul. Stand on your own feet, heed no man's opinion, no woman's scorn, if you believe you are in the right. If every

human being settled his own life there would be no need for state-aided charity. Work out your own fate, and when your feet are laid together, and your hands folded, and perhaps a silver piece laid on each eye, and those to whom you have stood nearest will hasten in all decency to lay you out of sight, the best they will know to say of you will be: "She never troubled any one." Go, big woman, and if you find other women weaker, teach them to be sufficient to themselves—give of your largesse, but hold your own soul in the hollow of your hand and give no man a mortgage on it. It is getting late; they may come back.'

'And they're welcome to. I am glad I came to you. I was hungry for some word stronger and warmer to my heart than I get out of books, that bothered me with the virtues and woes of dead saints and never touched the living woman within; that told me to trample on the natural feelings of my being as if existence is a crime and human love a sin. Oh! you dear little soul, am I not to know where you'll be at all? I'd like to tell you how I get on. And if you are sick, or perhaps want some one, I would like to do something for you.'

'Would you?'

'Ah then I would!'

The girl rises and takes a leather photograph case out of her bag. She points to one.

'If I give you her address, will you go to her and tell her of me? Say I will write in some weeks' time.'

'I will.'

'Thank you. There is the address, if you can go to her. And now let us say good-bye. I am tired, and to-morrow I have my journey before me. I shall sleep in that chair. Thank you for coming, you big, soft, foolish woman. And I used to think you a hard girl! Don't you be afraid for me, I am not afraid for myself. There are no dragons in the world nowadays that one cannot overcome, if one is not afraid of them, and sets up no false gods.'

'Good-bye!'

She nestles with tears in her smiling eyes into the big woman's arms, kisses her back, and pushes her gently out of the room.

The meeting has touched her, helped her to formulate her vague ideas, given her, as it were, a friendly set-off on her way.

The fire has burnt out, and the grey ashes lie in a heap on the tiles. She turns to the window; the still night has a fascination for her. The city clocks are booming out the death-knell of the day in deep tones, and the one in the room chimes out a silvery accompaniment like the laugh of a woman through a chorus of monks.

She wraps herself in a shawl and sits watching. One great star blinks down at her like a bright glad eye, and hers shine steadily back with the sombre light of an undaunted spirit waiting quietly for the dawn to break, to take the first step of her new life's journey.

HER SHARE

HAS it ever happened to you that, may be sitting on a stile on a summer's day, when the whole world about you basks in sunshine, and the gladness of the time whispers round you in the fields, and the trees hold long talks together in the woods, and the mystery of it speaks to you and works in you in some subtle way so that you too feel summer in you, a sudden shadow waves across the landscape ; a chill puff of wind sets all the leaves fluttering into a surprised murmur ; the tolling of a dead-bell floats across to you from the belfry in the neighbouring village, and a feeling of sadness grips your soul and oppresses it; the more keenly by contrast with your feeling of insouciant well-being—as a mocking whisper of relentless fate?

It was as the echo of the slow knell of a passing-bell on such a day, that her story struck me.

I was in the first flush summer of my new-found happiness. I wanted to get away by myself, to think, to dream it over again, to thrill at every recollected touch, to re-see every long look, to repeat every word shyly, to live it over and over again in thought. I wanted to escape from congratulations, questions, sympathy ; they jarred on me as when an ass brays suddenly when one sits

listening to the nightingales. I had a song in my own heart so wondrously new and strange that I was jealous of every disturbing note.

There was a clear week to our next meeting, and the arrival of an elder sister, whose own unhappy marriage made her a very Cassandra with regard to the fate of others, strengthened my desire for solitude. I resolved to run down to the country on my bicycle, to get out into the fields and listen to the birds singing, to match the melody in my own heart. I arrived one afternoon in early July at a little town in Buckinghamshire, and turned into the cobble-stoned yard of a quaint old inn, to find another 'bike' in the yard before me.

I was tired from the hills, parched with heat, and glad to wash off the dust before tea. I went downstairs, humming for very gladness, to the commercial room. It was a big, cool room near the old-fashioned kitchen, but somehow the clatter of the cups and saucers and the persistent 's's'ss' of an ostler in the yard, washing the legs of an old bay mare, seemed to belong to the atmosphere of the place.

There was another visitor in the room when I went in, a tall, thin woman standing with her face to the window, lost in thought. Her cycling dress proclaimed her as the owner of the other machine. I was glad it was a woman—just then the world held only one man. She was leaning against the side of the window, with her hands clasped behind her back. There was nothing to be seen but a

piece of ivy-covered roof, and a patch of blue sky, and the door of a loft, yet there she stood gazing at them ; perhaps she did not see them, there was a suggestive pathos in her attitude.

The maid came in and laid tea for two ; she never stirred. I wondered what her thoughts could be ; she struck me as quite middle-aged from the glimpse of cheek and neck I had.

'What nice fresh watercresses !' I said to the girl.

'Yes'm ; a little too late for Buckingham folks' (with the air of a connoisseur), 'city people finds 'em good.'

The woman turns round ; she has a nervous face, and her hair is nearly white at the temples. There was a strange quiet wistfulness in her eyes that made me sorry for her ; but then she smiled, and somehow I thought of sun-slants, and violets, and it struck me that if one were lonely one would forget it as one met her look.

'Ah ! do they still' (pointing to the cresses) 'make the local calendar ? You must know' (to me) 'that everything is reckoned by the coming and the cutting, the laying and cleaning of the beds ; and now I believe it has reached the dignity of an industry.'

'You know the town, then ? I fancied you were, like myself, a visitor on wheels.'

'And that is all ; I have not been here for fifteen years, but I was born here thirty-eight years ago and to-day is my birthday ; I had a fancy to see it again—'

She takes up her old position at the window. My own joy kept singing in me and I felt as if I had tenderness enough for all the world, and I was drawn to this woman with the lonely face and wistful voice. I wanted her to be glad as I.

'Are you going on a long tour?' I ventured to ask.

'No, I return to-morrow morning; I can never get away for long; my work is waiting for me when I return—'

'Tea is ready, 'm!'

We sit down and enjoy it as only women can; she does not say very much, but she encourages me to talk, and I feel drawn to her. I show her my ring, and I tell her half shyly of my great happiness, and how I had wished to get away to realise it quietly—and she smiles in response, saying :

'Yes, I know that feeling: that is why I came down to-day.'

There is such a peculiar resigned note in her voice that the idea comes to me that perhaps she may have ridden down to visit the grave of some one, and I forbear to ask. Besides, I have a sort of respect for her, she seems so old to me in my throbbing youth. But when tea is over I follow an impulse and put my hand caressingly on her arm. I ask her if I may go out with her, and she assents with a smile.

We walk up the cobble-stoned streets with the narrow houses, their quaint windows with the curiously wrought iron hasps, and the wonderful

geraniums and calceolarias in the rows of pots pressed against the diamond panes. We turn past the clear river with the lads walking through it on stilts, and the swallows darting in aerial circles with shrill squeals as they skim it fly-snapping ; past the old church and the little vicarage, nestling amidst trees, and an ugly row of pretentious little modern houses, with disproportionate bulging bow-windows like a paste stud in a paper shirt-front.

'They were not here in my time,' she says, and she stands and looks about her as a person receiving a shock at some change wrought in his absence. We pass through a laneway, skirt a copse, and turn into a clover field on a slope. The vicarage with its gabled roof, the grey church, and the great hedge of clipped yew, smooth as shaded velvet, and older than the oldest man in the town, she tells me, are clustered at the end of it. I feel subdued by the emotions that cross her face like shadows and I follow her in silence.

We pause and gaze around us. To our right is a field of oats ; the grey-green stipules of the ears quiver on their slender sap-green stalks, with blotches of blood-red poppies in between. Roses climb over every hedgerow and dabs of elder bloom seem thrown amongst them. And our feet sink in clover blossoms, pink and white and yellow and purple, with feathery stems of grass nodding lightly above them. We drink in the exquisite smell that is as the distilled sweetness of all that is good in

summer, in long greedy breaths, and sit down and bury our faces in the fragrant balls.

'O God, how sweet it is!' she says, with an undercurrent of passion breaking her voice. 'How it brings back things! How honey-sweet it is! O God, I would like to die in a clover field!'

There is such hopeless regret in her voice that I more than wonder what it is that brings it there. We sit in silence, she lying with her face in the clover; myriads of fragrant censers swing in the evening breeze. The metallic rattle of a mowing machine sounds in the distance, the songs of larks overhead, and a bird in a gorse-bush at our back keeps calling with a long-drawn, wheezy 'ch-e-e-s-ze ch-e-e-s-ze.'

'It makes you sad, it hurts you; I am so sorry,' I say.

'Shall I tell you why?' she asks. I nod.

'And yet, there is so little to tell. It is only now, sitting here, that I realise how barren in all that is best the years have been. Do you see that gable window where the roses are thickest? that was my room from childhood to girlhood. There I had most of my dreams, my illusions; there I used to beat my wings as a lark in a cage against the loneliness, the monotony of my life; and when my uncle died, and I had to go to the great weary city and struggle for existence, it was to there my thoughts used to fly when the seasons changed and the city was dreariest and the burden of work was heaviest. I think one feels things more as one grows older, one dwells on them

more. Youth is elastic, and its pain is hot and sharp while it lasts, but it never cankers as it does in later years. Now a measure of success has come to me, and comparative comfort, and I thought I would be at peace, and yet . . . The clover brings it back, brings back one face out of the blankness of the past. Strange I don't think until to-day that I have ever quite realised what it meant. It stands out now vividly in my memory as the recollection of an unheeded signpost on a lonely road flashes across the mind's eye of a wayfarer, showing him how he has missed the path. I seem lately to be having a sort of Indian summer of the senses. Vague feelings of disturbance that I used to have in early girlhood—you know them?—that have been hushed to quiescence in the years between, thrill in me now at a sensuous note of music, the coo of a baby. I have learned to blush again.' (With a shy flushing.) 'It is a pity hearts and souls do not always grow old with their bodies. I don't know that there is much to tell you; now that I come to think it over, it is scarcely a story. I can tell back the years as the beads of a brown rosary, always sombre in hue. I am thirty-eight to-day, and no man has ever kissed me.

'It is twenty years ago now, this time of year too, Squire Raymond came back in the spring—you can't see the Hall, it is behind that wood—and brought home a foreign wife, a Roman Catholic. There was an old chapel at the Hall disused since the Reformation, and he promised

her to have it restored, the old carvings replaced, and the wooden statues—they had been partially burnt at one time. The railway has made great changes, and spoiled much, as it always does. Down there, where the telegraph pole stands behind that copper beech, there used to be a cottage, and between it and the vicarage a meadow. A lane led from it—Lover's Lane. I was coming through it late one evening—I had been to a croquet match, and I was singing to myself as I sauntered home—when I ran against a stranger at the turn. He raised a slouched hat and said, ‘Your pardon, miss,’ with a soft foreign accent and a grace that was strange to me then. I remember I stood still after he passed on, and I carried home the expression in his eyes, and when I woke in the morning it was the first thing I recalled, and I closed my eyes again to gather it into my mind and fix it. It haunted me through all the days that followed, and something kept me from speaking about him, although all the affairs of the county were known at the vicarage. I learned somehow that he was only a foreign workman brought over to restore the carvings.

‘Some days afterwards we went to call on Squire Raymond, and he took us into the chapel to see how the work got on. *He* was up on a scaffolding, he had on a linen blouse, and a lot of tools stuck in his belt; and I hardly dared to look at him, my eyelids seemed weighted. I remember the resentment that blazed up in me when my uncle spoke to him in the same patron-

ising way he used to talk to Bunker the saddler, and I lingered behind them to say a good-day to him, but he never looked down, though I felt he saw me. He lodged in the cottage I spoke of, and I gave Goody Thornton some sewing to do just to have an excuse to go there. I remember perfectly, as if it were yesterday, how I stood in that window one day and watched him go to the village, and how I slipped out, ran down the lane, and raised the latch, and went into the funny little kitchen. I wonder where all the quaint furniture has gone. His room was at the side of it. I know every detail of it: the clear-starched curtains, the patchwork quilt and equally wonderful piece of crochet representing Ruth gleaning, and the stiff row of flower-pots in the window. I remember how oddly I was stirred, and how shyly curious I was to see his things. Goody said he was as particular as a gentleman. A long row of books was arranged on the chest of drawers; I felt guilty as I opened them and read the name on the fly-leaf; it had a Slav ending; I copied it later on into my note-book. I remember the odd thrill of pleasure I felt as I read such of the titles as I could make out. My uncle was a good linguist, and had given me a smattering of foreign languages, at that time enough to give me a reputation as a blue-stockings. There was an old edition of Shakespeare, another of Spenser, several volumes of Heine, Max Stirner, "Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum, 1844"—I got it since in the British Museum—and some German meta-

physics, and several volumes of poetry in a Slav tongue.

' There were long pipes, such queer shapes, and a pouch embroidered with beads and silken letters, a rack with carving tools, and a velvet cap and coat. Do you know, when I am alone in the dark I can see every one of the things that belonged to him in that room. I unrolled a housewife on his table ; it was filled with needles and skeins of thread and pins of foreign make, and it was exquisitely embroidered with fairy-like wreaths of flowers and a heart with a dart through it, and a basket with tiny ribbon roses. A sudden unreasoning jealousy rose in me at the sight of it, and I can remember perfectly well saying over and over again, as if to convince myself, " It was his mother made it, do you hear, it was his mother !" I was delighted Goody stayed for a gossip ; I liked to be there, I liked to touch his things. It was like a page out of the great, wonderful outside world. I remember when I was quite little a show came, with camels and elephants and other wild things in cages, and how I dreamed of them for nights, and longed to run away with the showman. His things roused the same feeling in me. There was a carved crucifix lying on his pillow, and the first rosary I had ever seen, and on the end of his bed an old violin with sorghum red wood in a carved case. They spoke to me in a strange way ; there was an enchanting flavour of mystery about them that spoke of southern lands and sunshine. I felt

vaguely that somewhere in under my pink and white English skin there lurked a brown spirit that responded to their influence. I often stole in there after that until I knew the names of the books by heart; and sometimes, as I saw the carving progress, a dull pain—I did not then realise what it meant—used to gnaw at me; and once I laid my face against his velvet coat as it hung on the door; it smelt of tobacco, and I cried without knowing why, and a knot of ribbon I wore at the neck of my gown caught in a button and hung there—and I left it there. . . . I had a reckless wish that he should know I used to go there, and sometimes I left a flower. . . .'

'How very strange! And did you never speak to him?'

'No, he was a workman in every one's eyes, and I was the vicar's niece.'

I try to see her as she must have looked then, but it is hard to picture her as anything but a faded, disillusioned woman with a weary, lovable face and wistful eyes; she looked like a fruit that has grown to maturity in the shade and withered before it ripened properly.

'Squire Raymond came to see us one day, and spoke of him as a genius, a wonderful woodcarver and modeller in clay, an artist but a Socialist. Socialism in those days was looked upon much as Anarchy to-day, if not worse: it was not a thing to be taken into consideration by state parties. That meadow then was planted with clover as this is now. My uncle could barely recognise the

National Anthem, and Goody was deaf, and there were no houses ; so evening after evening all through that glorious June month, I used to play, and he used to answer me with an improvised echo of whatever I played to him. It was a strange secret duet, to which no one had a clue. One night he played to me—ah ! how can I tell you of it ?—music such as I had heard in dreams, or in mad hours when the restless spirit worked in me ; music as if all the hearts in the world were being pierced with swords that cried out their anguish as they slayed. I walked up and down the garden in my white gown ; he could see me from his window, and he drew my soul with his bow as one winds silk out of a cocoon, and he bent it across the strings of his violin, and sent it flitting out as a sigh into a world of pain, just to wile it back and croon it to rest in himself in a last soft note. My girl friends used to look curiously at me, and men took more notice of me, for I blossomed suddenly into a kind of beauty that belongs to every woman once in her life. I scarcely dared tell myself what it meant. I know that all that summer there was a thrumming on an unknown chord in my innermost being, a wonderful by-song in my heart that I alone heard. Intense joy has its element of pain. The days were too short, and at night I used to creep out of bed and kneel at the window and cry for no known reason. Then one night I awoke with a strange feeling as of some one laying a hand upon my forehead, and I rose and went to the

window as usual. Something shivered through me, and I saw a stir in the shadow of the great copper beech on the road below, and my heart fluttered as a fledgeling trying its wings for the first time, and I knew he was there, and I understood all at once why I used to wake with that feeling of being watched. His voice stole in to me with the smell of the clover on the night breeze ; not singing, rather whispering in song, so that only he and I and the soft-bodied moths and the big white owl that flitted heavily across the road could hear it . . .'

She has forgotten me ; it is as if she is reading aloud the pages of a book that has been shut up in herself for so long that the story is new to her.

'The words he sang were foreign, but the melody spoke passionately, warmly, caressingly, with a chord of despair that turned my heart to water and touched the most secret fibres of my being, hurting me with love. I felt as if I were in a trance and he were singing my requiem over me. Then he changed the air and sang a little tender thing with a refrain that said plainly in this strange tongue, "I love you!" I tried to hum it back to him, but no sound issued through my lips ; I felt as if the fingers of fate were clutching my throat, choking down the sound ; I made the most strenuous efforts to shake them off ; the blood beat in my temples ; I struggled and strained, but no sound came. I watched him with a dull despair come forward into the silver white moonlight on the white road ; as his voice died out in a sigh,

he looked up at me. I snatched a rose that was nodding drowsily, with all its pink leaves crumpled up like a baby's fist, and I put my lips to it and flung it down with a groan. I saw him catch it and raise it to his, and then a cloud-drift scudded across the moon and a night-jar shrieked hoarsely, and still the fingers clutched my throat, and though I groaned his name with all my being, though my whole self was one utterance of his name, no sound other than his vanishing footsteps and the shrill, pained shriek of some little beast in the clutch of a stoat broke the stillness of the night. And for years after, ay, even now, I wake and hear the steps growing fainter and fainter down that white road

There is a long silence. 'Yes?' I query at length.

'Well, the rest of that night is blank, and when day came I knew before I went to Goody's that he had left. He had left a parcel for me—a box carved as a book ; I peeped at it, and then hid it till night came. The hours of that day dragged like years, but when at last it came, I locked myself in my room and looked at it. I cried to think how he must have worked at night to finish it, and my heart swelled with pride, for it was the work of an artist. The story, if it is a story, is carved on the lid in wonderful tracery—a female figure with a set face, mocking eyes, and inexorable mouth, "Fate" written on her girdle, has her hand on the bolt of a prison window. Behind the bars a man's face, *his* face, stares out with hopeless yearning—and

do you know, when I saw it I set my teeth in my arm to relieve the pain it gave me? And tumbling down the prison walls are roses that seem to live in the wood—their very petals are loose as if a breath might shake them, one great blossom nods tantalisingly before the gaze of the man; and when I looked I marvelled, because growing out of the trailing roses I saw myself—my hair, my face, my hands. It is like one of those puzzle-pictures. I was only suggested by a curl of petal, a twist of leaf or stem, and yet there was no mistaking it (though you would fail to see a likeness now); the story was told. Ah, if he only knew! The other side is a sea, suggested with a few lines; an endless desolate sea, with a raft and a solitary figure floating out towards the horizon. All the beauty of my life was on the cover, and my life has been as the empty wooden box with a date in it.'

The sun has gone down long since, and the birds have hushed them, her voice fits into the twilight.

'I have cried so often over it when the loneliness of life has touched me sorely, that the wood is stained and smoothened.'

She has risen to her feet as she speaks, with a bunch of clover in her hand, and we turn towards the town.

'The smell of the clover and the sound of his voice are always associated in my senses, and perhaps, perhaps—for the dream is always greater than the reality—it is best so; but—with soft sadness—'it is of him I will think when I am dying, and death may come easier for the thought.'

GONE UNDER

ONE forenoon in late autumn an outward-bound steamer lay close to a wharf in New York. She lay quietly waiting for the signal of her departure, in which few seemed to take an interest. There was a lonely note in her waiting. No telegraph boys bearing God-speeds to much-initialled citizens, no loquacious interviewers, no crowd of friends and relatives with floral offerings boarded the gangway of the *Portugal*, for she was only a third-rate steamer carrying a live freight of cattle to London, and her score of passengers either studied economy, absence of scrutiny, or a longer spell of sea.

The last of the weary, harassed beasts was packed closely under decks, but their presence was betrayed by uneasy lowing and a warm smell that made an Irish dock-labourer think, with tears in his eyes, of a thatched cabin on a Kerry hill-side, and his old mother, with the rent coming due ; made him brace his back to the work anew and croon an old Irish melody, because of the ten dollars saved to send her.

A girl leaning over the side smiles as she hears him ; she has a grave, tender face, plain at a first look ; but her eyes are the changeful hazel that

lighten with mirth or darken with thought, as when cloud-rifts or sun-slants flit across a turf-fringed tarn.

She has no 'style,' and her clothes are plainly made and rather shabby ; she is going home on a free pass.

She has been working for two years in New York, and is glad to go back, even if it be only to seek fresh work amongst her own people. She has read much, thought much, worked hard, and lived clean—been necessarily lonely. She has observed closely during her stay in this polyglot city of striking paradoxes, this monster dollar-mint, this gigantic sieve through which the surplus of the old world is silted over the new ; city of many sects and blatant atheism ; narrow prudery, and naked vice ; where foreign literature is emasculated, and native newspapers are as broad as the Bible, and filthy as Sterne.

She has suffered physically under the mighty throb and high pressure hustle of a life that rolls on like a mighty steam-roller, crushing the sap out of the men before their prime, making the women the most consciously sexless, and unconsciously selfish, on the face of the globe.

She has learnt strange lessons in social economy ; understands how sealskin 'saques' and imported hats can be bought on a salary of six dollars a week ; has lost most of her illusions.

She is watching idly a man and a woman who have driven up in a closed carriage. They have seated themselves on a bench on the wharf and

are talking earnestly. The woman has her back turned to the boat ; she is very tall, her figure is superb, her waist too round and too small. The sunlight mates with the golden knot of hair under her crimson toque. She wears a plaid woollen gown in which cream predominates, and a red satin bodice, and carries a useless silk parasol to match. She is dressed for a garden-party, and, save for the new travelling-bag, ulster, and rug lying next her on the wharf, shows no signs of fitness for a perhaps rough voyage.

The man seems to be trying to reassure or convince her, but she shakes her head as she listens, and her shoulders heave, and she wipes her eyes impatiently.

The girl wonders vaguely in what relationship they stand to one another, and if she will be a passenger, and why in that gown.

A laughing party troop up the gangway and divert her attention. Most of them are members of a stranded burlesque company, and they have come to say good-bye to the leading girl.

The doctor joins them, and the quiet girl, who takes life too seriously, listens with a touch of wistfulness to their chaff and quaint slang. She even admires the effect of their smartly cut clothes, and is not feminine enough to see how cheaply it is gained.

She is a great child in spite of her knowledge, and she envies these girls their gift of repartee and the ease with which they turn aside foolish compliments. She has had little experience of men—

she does not get on with them very well. She has started with old-fashioned ideas as to their superiority ; she is so desperately in earnest that she takes them too seriously, she fails to see how comic they are, and they find her a bore. She is having a lesson now, and she tells herself musingly : ' This is the secret : look pretty, laugh à *pleine gorge*, if you have white teeth or dimples ; smile up through your lashes if they are long ; don't tax them, don't ask them to take you seriously ; just amuse them, that must be the great thing, to amuse them.'

Meanwhile the bustle has increased ; the odd people that crowd the deck of outward-bound vessels troop down the gangways. The cattle-jobbers laugh lustily and bandy jokes with friends on the wharf ; the steam falls in feathery spray, with a suspicion of oil in it ; and ear-splitting whistles call responsive bellows from the penned beasts below, and echo through the creak of grain-elevators and giant cranes, and the thousand vagrant sounds of the harbour.

The woman with the red bodice comes on deck ; she steps to the girl's side and waves her hand to the man below. He raises his hat and goes, looking back as the carriage turns.

She is younger than a back view alone would lead one to think ; she cannot be more than five and twenty ; but there are fine lines about her eyes, they are circled with heavy indigo stains, and her lids are swollen with tears. She is dazzlingly fair, and the blue veins show in delicate tracery at her temples, her lips are crimson, and

the under one is full, but her chin runs softly into her white throat.

The girl, endowed as she is with the passionate worship of beauty and the imagination that belong to Celtic ancestry, feels attracted to her, and yet repelled.

Off at last! She has watched the scene too often during her luncheon hour from the top of the great building in which she has worked to see any novelty in it; she goes down to find her cabin. It is dark, small, near the pantry, as befits a shabby girl who travels free. She arranges her few belongings and goes on deck. The smell of the cattle, for it is hot down there, and the hatchways are open, oozes forth and mingles with the briny smell of the sea, recalling childhood scenes—stretches of sandy dune melting into the grey-green sea, red-tiled homesteads, and lowing kine going home to be milked; and she realises that she has been home-sick unawares; that the old world has a glamour for her in its reverend age, far beyond the crude green youth of the new—the witchery of its great past, and the wonderful host of its living dead—its dead in some of whom she has a share, who still live in her, making her what she is.

The first days pass as usual on a steamer of the kind; she sees nothing of the fair woman, but notices that the stewardess brings many empty bottles out of her cabin. It amuses her to watch people, it is almost like a play in which she is sole audience. Two maiden sisters take a fancy to

her and have a daily talk. The little actress sings and plays, and the men cluster round her, but the doctor is first in favour.

Then the wind changed, places got vacant, and the 'fiddles' appeared on the table, and early one morning they ran into the boisterous clutches of an autumn gale. Her cabin became unsupportable, the nauseous smell of paint and bilge-water made her sick; all the plate and crockery in the pantry next her seemed to shiver into atoms, and wash about her very ears; and sometimes the little silvery thread of light in the pear-shaped globe would dwindle to a red thread to plunge her suddenly into total darkness. She fought through her dressing, and the fresher air of the saloon revived her, and she crept up on to one of the lounges.

Stifled cries from the state-rooms mingle with the rattle of chains and howl of the wind. The steamer strains and groans like a huge beast in labour, and the screw rises and falls with a desperate thud. A second of suspensive quiet, and they sink into darkness with a sickening dive that turns her hot and cold with a feeling of melting; and the screw pops out of the water, and the steamer shudders, until they float up again, and it is struck by a giant wave with a crash like the deafening report of mighty cannon, terrific after the ghastly silence. A rush of hurried steps mingled with confused hoarse shouts overhead, and the trickle of water finding its way out again adds to the feeling of excitement.

The doctor passed through, and paused to give

her a word of praise for her pluck, but a shout down the companion-way hurried him off to a man crushed in the cattle-pens. Sometimes in a lull in the tumult of wind and waves she fancied that she could hear terrified groans from the imprisoned beasts. Then the stewardess disappeared, and the second steward answered the bells instead, and crept along the floor balancing brandy and biscuits. She fell into a troubled sleep to wake with a start, as if some one had called her. She sat up and listened ; it is colder, darker, and the steamer labours more ; the electric light is out, and a few lamps swing dismally to and fro. A stifled groan reaches her, and a voice moans in a cabin near her :

‘O God, will no one come to me, I guess I’ll die, my God, my God !’ She got down and managed by waiting for the uprising swell to creep on her hands and knees towards it.

She pushed aside the curtain and went in ; the golden-haired woman lay moaning in the lower berth ; the bed-clothes had fallen into a confused heap upon the floor, and she was uncovered, shivering with cold, her hair streaming out like amber drift-weed at every lurch ; a trickle of blood ran from one of her white wrists. A diminutive pair of boots, an empty champagne bottle, fragments of glass and china, and an upturned tray slid noisily to and fro on the floor ; an unopened bottle is propped with towels in the basin. The girl caught the empty one as it rolled towards her, and thrust it, with the other loose things, into the empty berth.

The woman is utterly helpless with terror and sickness, and the girl had to exert all her strength to lift her into a better position ; she bound up her wrist and tucked the bedclothes and rug about her, and knelt down, holding fast to keep herself from slipping ; but the smell of stale champagne and the closeness of the air made her feel faint, and she touched the bell.

The second steward answered it, muttering angrily as he pushed aside the curtain, but checked himself on seeing her there :

‘Can you tidy up a little ?’ she asks hesitatingly, ‘mop up the floor and straighten things?’

‘I’ll have a try, miss ; the stewardess has sprained her wrist, and every one’s ill. You just leave her to me, I’ll fix her up, she’s boozed’—with contempt—‘that’s wot she is.’

‘Don’t leave me ; O God, don’t leave me !’ whimpers the woman in terror, and her blue eyes stare wildly ; and the girl, who has flushed at his words, pauses irresolutely and then goes back and kneels again.

‘It can’t matter,’ she says to the youth ; ‘the poor thing is frightened, and perhaps I can do her some good.’

He tides in silence, and later he brings her some sandwiches and tells her the galley fires are out, and some men hurt, and one man washed overboard, and that the night promises to be no better than the day. He fixes her some cushions for her to kneel upon, and fetches a striped blanket and tucks it respectfully round her, with a look of ill-

concealed disgust at the woman and resentment for her own sake. For her face reminds him of a little girl with whom he kept company down Wapping way, one whole glorious summer, until she got 'saved' and joined the 'army,' and gave him up as unregenerate.

The woman moaned and cowered in terror, and once when there was a crash, and they were plunged in darkness, she put out her hand, and clutching the girl, besought her to pray.

The night passed slowly, but towards morning the gale abated, and the steamer rolled with long steady swings, and the woman fell asleep holding the girl's hand. The latter is cramped by her crouching position and nods wearily, but it never occurs to her to leave her post. At length she dozes and has a dream, in which dragons and leviathans fight bloody battles, churning red-stained foam as they hurl islets at one another in their rage, whilst a mermaid with streaming golden tresses urges them on with a shrill voice like the scream of sea-mews.

The lad comes in the early dawn with some coffee, and tells her the worst is over. She forces the woman to eat a little, and then finds a hair-brush ; it is silver-backed, and brand new, as everything is, even the night things she is wearing, as if bought for the journey. She brushes the wonderful hair into a long shining braid, parts the fringe, and the uncured hair, soft as raw silk, frames the temples chastely ; the head and forehead and drooping white lids and pencilled brows

have the delicacy of a Madonna by Ary Scheffer ; but the mouth cannot lie—the pout of the wine-red lips, the soft receding chin, and the strange indefinable expression that lurks about them rather fits a priestess of passion.

'I would paint her as Helen,' thinks the girl, 'I wonder who she is, and why she sets out on a journey with a satin bodice and lace-flounced petticoats, and how old she is?' Her forehead is a child-girl's ; her mouth a courtesan's of forty. She unclasps the hand that prisons hers, and considers it : hands tell age better than faces. It is white, pink-palmed, and satin-soft, the nails are manicured and polished as agates—twenty-five. She has been so alone that she has acquired a habit of observing closely things that happier women barely understand. She speculates and weaves stories about the people she meets ; they strike her fancy as the characters in a book or picture, and interest her always. She is saved, not knowing them, from finding their limitations.

The forenoon has dragged through before the woman awakes from her long restful sleep ; she smiles up at the girl, and then a burning flush stains her face, and she turns it aside, and when it has ebbed away she looks back searchingly into the girl's grave eyes, and taking her hand kisses it closely and holds it to her cheek.

'You are better now, I can leave you, I am very tired,' says the girl.

'Yes,' letting go her hand ; then with an impulse : 'Will you——?'

'Yes?' a silence.

'Will I——?'

'Will you?—ah, no matter—thank you—I guess you'd best go —,' and she turns her face to the wall.

The girl creeps to the top of the companion-way for a breath of fresh air. The sea still washes the after-deck, and sometimes a sheet of spray dashes over the bridge. A dismantled barque rides erratically on the right, and a piece of wreckage dances on the waves. Deep groans and a pained lowing rise from the hold, and a smell of steaming beasts blows with the wind; some sailors, in shining oilskins, are tipping a dead ox overboard. Her vivid imagination calls up horrid scenes of broken limbs under heavy swaying bodies, gored sides, and gouged eyes amongst the penned beasts below; and she descends with a shudder. She visits most of the cabins, and in an unobtrusive way shortens the time for the other women, but she does not go near the only one that really awakes her interest.

Two days pass, and then the little actress appears in a fascinating tea-gown; she is better, for she has curled her fringe and koholed her lashes, and the doctor is radiant. The maiden sisters come out with knitting-bags and Testaments, and the woman who travels in embroidery silks follows, and the man who quoted 'Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep' the first evening, and sang nautical songs (in which 'yeo-ho' was the only intelligible word) in a brave manner, and collapsed

at the first roll. They congratulate her as the only passenger with 'sea-legs,' and are very friendly, but when she speaks of the sufferings of the other woman, they purse their lips, look virtuous, and change the subject.

The girl is sitting in her favourite corner, and presently the woman, Mrs. Grey on the passenger-list, comes out with a novel and seats herself near her. In reply to the girl's shy query she flushes a little, says she is well, and begins to read; her eyelids are pink and swollen, her whole face is puffed as with much weeping.

The little actress plays for them, entrails them with the spirit of music that is so often a birth-right of the children of Israel, witches, and warms, and saddens them, as Miriam in olden days. They beg for their favourite songs, and once in a pause the woman, it is the first time she has spoken to any of them, asks for a serenade of Kjerulff. There is a dead silence, every one looks round—the little actress very slowly—then, drawing herself up to her full height, she lets her black eyes travel coldly from the woman's head to her feet and up again, with the well-known air of affronted scorn with which she is wont to annihilate the villain in her best part, and turns away without replying.

The woman winces, the girl has winced more; she moves nearer and speaks to her, but the woman makes no reply; keeps her eyes on her book, and tries to brave it out. When a few minutes have passed, in which every one talks together, she goes back to her cabin; the bell rings sharply, and the

steward answering it comes out calling to the second steward :

‘A bottle of fizz for Mrs. Grey!’

She is seen no more that day.

Late the following evening the girl is up on deck watching the phosphor froth in the steamer’s wake, and the moon playing hide-and-seek through a feathery maze of clouds. She is roused by *her* voice beside her :

‘Have you heard when we arrive?’

‘Yes, Saturday, if all goes well.’

‘And this is Wednesday, oh, my God, my God, pity me!’ (under her breath). ‘If I were not such a coward’—with passionate emphasis—‘I’d just jump over right here into the middle of that shining streak. It would make a lovely shroud wouldn’t it?’ (with a laugh). She rests her hand on the girl’s shoulder, and then her head, and rocks her shoulders as if in pain. The girl smoothes her hair silently.

‘Why are you so good to me?’ she asks suddenly.

‘I don’t know, because you are a woman, I suppose, as I am —’

‘I believe I’ll go mad,’ she cries, ruffling her hair back from her lovely wretched face. ‘I must tell some one, my head is bursting; come down to my cabin later on, will you?’

‘Yes, if it will help you in any way, yes.’

The head steward has been standing near them. He saunters up to the girl as the woman leaves her, and makes some remark about the fineness of

the night ; but he keeps his cap on, and has a cheap cigar stuck between his teeth ; there is a familiar note, too, in his voice. Her look of grave surprise disconcerts him, and he moves off with a swagger. She has been conscious of a difference in her treatment for some days, a shrinking on the part of the women, a touch of insolence in the glance of the men. It hurts her a little.

It is late when she seeks the woman. She finds her crouched on the floor, with her head resting on her arms, that are crossed on the plush seat. She looks up as the girl enters.

'I don't know why I asked you to come,' she cries, 'except that I am so wretched, and you seem so sure of yourself. I am very miserable.'

'Poor woman'—with tenderness—'don't tell me anything on impulse. Can't I help you without? Aren't you going to friends?'

She groans and buries her face in her hands.

'Is your husband in London, don't you want to go to him?'

'O, no no,' she writhes, 'I am afraid. O God, what *will* I do?'

'But why? Listen to me, Mrs. Grey,' she says persuasively.

The woman lifts her head, her breath smells of brandy, and says :

'My name is Edith.'

'Isn't it Grey as well though—I thought——'

'No, I am called so, I am not really married——'

There is a pause.

'Well, no matter. He looked upon you as his

wife, didn't he? He was good to you or you wouldn't be going to him.'

'He cabled for me, I have to go.'

'And you don't want to?' with a puzzled look.
'Don't you care about him?'

'I did when I was with him, but he left me. He shouldn't have, I implored him not,' with a wild gesture. 'Now he is angry, and I am afraid,' sobbing.

'But why, dear woman, what have you done? Tell me'—with hesitation—'is it because of this?' pointing to a bottle.

The question seems to strike the woman in some ludicrous way, for she stifles an hysterical inclination to laughter, and replies shamefacedly:

'No, oh no, he does not know I take anything, it isn't that.'

'Why do you? It shows so plainly, and people notice it, and it spoils you—you are so beautiful, it's such a pity—'

'I can't help myself—I want to forget—I used to nearly go mad, and so I began it, and now I can't do without it. I wasn't meant to be what I am, do believe me'—with a pleading in her voice. 'I am not bad at heart, I don't care about it really, but I can't help it. I was only sixteen when he took me, I was a silly fool of a girl, and I had no one belonging to me. I thought it was a grand thing. Even his relatives didn't know I wasn't married to him. He petted and spoiled me, and dressed me like a doll, and whenever I wanted to learn anything he laughed at me. There

were times when I wanted something better, I used to tire of it all : but I was always a little afraid of him ; the set we mixed in was a fast one, and I learnt no good, and the women I met were worse than the men——'

‘But he was really fond of you?’

‘Yes, in a way. He loved my beauty, he was proud of my figure, and the admiration other men had for me. I had a very good time, and I enjoyed life, except sometimes when a fit came over me. I suppose I should have gone on like that for ever, only—I don’t know why I should tell you this—there is something in you draws it out of me—well, one day’—there is a sharper note in her voice—‘I found I was going to have a little child. He was away when I discovered it, and I was just crazy with delight—I played with dolls until I was fifteen, you know. I used to sit and think about it, and I wished he would come home. I never was so glad. They’re such cunning little things, with such cute little ways, and,’—there is a touching pathos in her tear-stained face—‘when he did come I flew to tell him——’

‘Yes?’

‘He was as angry as ever he could be ; it was as if he struck me sharply in the face. He said it would spoil me ; he didn’t want it ; it would make complications ; he had no intention of marrying me, we were quite well as we were—we had a dreadful scene—he—well—I defied him for the first time—I could have killed him, I hated him so—I was almost mad, I wanted to run away, to

be safe. Then he pretended to be sorry, and I let him fool me'—clenching her hands—'fool me into thinking it was all right. He took me to a quiet place in the country, asked me not to write to any one about it, and I was to stay there till the time came. I was quite content, I used to go into the woods and listen to the birds, I was just as happy as ever I could be. Then the time drew near, and we went up to town. He took me to Madame Rachelle's. I thought it a little strange, I had heard so many stories about her establishment; but he said I should be well taken care of, and I was a fool in his hands, and too happy to trouble—'

Her face is set and her voice is bitter.

'They gave me some anæsthetic, and when I came back to myself, as it seemed to me out of a rush of swirling waters, I was lying, too weak to lift my hand, too confused to call. But suddenly I did; it all came back to me in a flash of consciousness, and I sat up and screamed, for I had a presentiment of what it meant; and I beat with my hands and called for my baby,—and that she-devil, curse her! rushed in and held me down, and put a handkerchief over my face, and I lost myself again, but not altogether. I heard his voice, and I pretended to be unconscious. My brain was in a whirl, and I fancied'—her voice has sunk to a whisper, it is as if she is muttering to herself—'I could hear *it* cry, and that it wanted me so; I felt its tears on my breast, it was only my milk had come, and *that* made me think of the

little baby head ; and I felt as if my brain and heart would burst. I nearly went crazy. I got cunning, and when she bent over the bed I lay quite still and held my breath. She thought I was unconscious, and I watched her ; she went into the dressing-room, and then a nurse called her hurriedly. She had many patients,—with a laugh—‘and she went away with her. I got up quickly, and by holding to things I managed to crawl to that room. *I had a feeling it was there.*’ There is such a frenzy of passion in her voice, such a seal of despairing remembrance on her face, that the girl holds her breath in suspense.

‘I got there and crawled in, . . . there was a bundle there——.’ She chokes down a sob and her eyes flash fire ‘I felt my heart stop. . . . I snatched it up and unrolled it, and God curse them ! it was my little one. I couldn’t believe it was dead. I kissed it and tried to warm it, and I put it inside my nightgown between my breasts ; and then I heard voices, and I rushed out and down the stairs. A nurse met me and tried to stop me, but I screamed and bit her hand. Then more came, and I felt everything grow black around me, and my little one melted like a lump of ice on my heart, and I knew no more.’ There is a silence, both women are pale. ‘When I came to my senses I was back in the country, and they told me I had been ill for months, and that I could never endure him to come near me.’

‘You poor thing, you poor woman,’ cries the

girl ; ‘the brutes ! I would have had them up for murder. I would never have rested——’

‘So you think, but I guess you wouldn’t. Money can do everything ; the certificate of death said it was stillborn, and it was signed by a medical man. It was only last year the death of a schoolgirl of good family caused such scandal that the place was closed ; but too many big people were implicated to make a fuss, and Madame Rachelle escaped. I went back to town and threw myself into every dissipation. He was glad ; I *seemed* reconciled, but it haunted me. I could feel it at night groping about for me, and the chill of its poor little hands clung to me, and I used to drink to get warm again and forget it. I used to wonder if it cried when it came into the world, and if they hurt it. Can you think’—with piteous, hiccoughing sobs—‘how any one could hurt a little thing like that ? or can you wonder I drink ? I would have loved it so—I wanted something better than I had. I wasn’t meant to be bad ; you don’t think I was—say you don’t’—gazing eagerly into the girl’s face, that is blanched by intense feeling.

‘No, you poor woman, you were not meant to be bad. I think you were meant to be *very good*. I have known many women, and I think the *only divine* fibre in a woman is her maternal instinct. Every good quality she has is consequent or co-existent with that. Suppress it, and it turns to a fibroid, sapping all that is healthful and good in her nature, for I have seen it—we had many girls

in the office. . . . Every woman ought to have a little child, if only as a moral educator. I have often thought that a woman who mothers a bastard, and endeavours bravely to rear it decently, is more to be commended than the society wife who contrives to shirk her motherhood. *She* is at heart loyal to the finest fibre of her being, the deep, underlying generic instinct, the "mutterdrang," that lifts her above and beyond all animalism, and fosters the sublimest qualities of unselfishness and devotion. No, indeed, you poor woman, you are not bad ; you are, perhaps, just as God intended you !'

Her cheeks burn with the vehemence of her words, and a tear hangs on her lashes.

'But drink will not help you, believe me ; work might—'

'But what could I do ? I can't put a stitch in my clothes. I haven't learnt a single useful thing. I know how to attract men'—with bitterness—"that is all.'

'Have you ever told him how you felt, spoken to him frankly ? After all, he was good to you in a way ; he must be touched by it. Try it when you meet him, dear ! Let him see the real woman, as you have let me !'

Her words have a startling effect ; the woman's face changes, a look of terror and the remembrance of something momentarily forgotten gathers upon it ; she hides her face, and rocks impatiently with moaning cries.

'It's no use, no use ; it's too late. My God,

what is to become of me? You don't know all ; you could never understand ; you are strong, you don't know what reckless passion means—if you only knew you would go away, you wouldn't touch me. O God ! O God !'

She has slid on to the floor, and kneels, wringing her hands and crying, the girl looking helplessly down at her.

' Try me,' she says, ' I promise you I won't go away. What are you afraid to tell him? what else is there ? '

' What else?' she groans, stretching out her hands, ' the worst that could be. He had to go to Europe a year ago. I begged him to take me with him. I knew how it would be if I were left ; I had no occupation, and the child haunted me ! I drank to kill it ; it made me reckless, and he was the only check. But he said he couldn't take me ; he wouldn't. I tried to tell him what I felt, but I was afraid. And now a letter was written to him about me, and he cabled to me to sail by this steamer—my passage was taken—or never see him again. I was not at home ; the cable was sent after me ; I had only time to catch the train for the boat, without clothes or anything. I wired for my things to be sent, but they did not come in time, and I had to get some before I came on board. I know him so well ; he will never forgive me, and I am afraid to face him, and I have hardly any money.

' But I don't understand. What was written to him? Who wrote ? '

'Oh, a woman, of course ! she got to know things ; she likes him.'

'Well, but can't you explain ? isn't it something you can tell him ?'

The golden head shakes a dismal denial ; and a tortured moan is the only reply.

'Tell *me*, then ; two heads are better than one.'

'You saw'—the girl has to stoop and catch the words—'that man who came with me ?'

'Yes.'

'He is my husband's cousin ; he owes everything to him. Well, it . . . it . . . *was with him*—he used to come to see me ; he didn't admire me . . . not a bit . . . I was lonely and wretched, and I don't know what madness possessed me—you can't understand. One just gets insane, and lets oneself be carried away. I think the devil gets hold of one. I tried to attract him ; there was a kind of excitement in it, . . . and . . . well, we let ourselves drift . . .' —she has grown calmer as she speaks—'and afterwards, when we thought of him, we felt like shooting ourselves. He cried like a child and cursed me, and I hated him ; but that soon passed over—we grew reckless, and sometimes we quarrelled and said good-bye ; then we felt miserable, and sought one another again, and'—with a musing air—'all through there was a kind of fascination in the danger, though we didn't really care a bit for one another.'

The girl is dumb with pained realisation ; it is her first actual contact with a problem of such a nature, and so little does she grasp it that she says:

'It's dreadful, but you must tell him the truth. You see he sends for you in spite of all, and, besides, he first taught you to . . . to . . . be as you are ; he must remember that. He shouldn't have left you to yourself ; you were beautiful and wretched ; you must tell him——'

The woman cowers lower ; her hair has come undone and covers her shoulders like a tawny golden garment.

'I can't,' she groans hoarsely ; '*that was a year ago . . . since . . .* Oh, I can't tell you—I can't ! Better go, far better go ! you can't help me—no one can——'

'*Since?*' repeats the girl, with stark-white lips and horror-filled eyes, '*since?*'

'*There was some one else.* You don't know what it is to have nothing to hold one back. I had no control over myself, something used to possess me ; it is always like that, *one stifles the memory of the first with the excitement of the second.* Afterwards I wanted to kill myself straight away, that is God's truth, but I was afraid.'

There is a long silence, only the woman cries with stifled groans of crushing misery ; and the girl listens as if in a confused, horrible dream to the sobs that shake the bowed figure at her feet, for she has risen, and is standing at the door, holding the curtain with one hand. Something in the crouching figure, with the rippling waves of hair falling about her in a glory of colour, recall to her the beautiful story of tender pity for such another ; and the simple great words of it repeat

themselves in her inner soul, and the lesson comes home to her, and she goes back, and, stooping, clasps her arms about the heaving shoulders of the woman at her feet, and says, with her heart breaking her voice :

‘ Hush, hush, Edith, sister ! look at me ! ’

The woman obeys with incredulous look, and then buries her face in the girl’s lap, saying :

‘ I am not worth it, indeed I am not. I am sure you—— ’

‘ Think nothing. I have no right to sit in judgment ; I have never been tempted. I simply can’t understand it. I am as ready to help you now as before, if I only can—— ’

‘ You say that, but’—lifting her head and searching the grave white face—‘ would you kiss me ? ’

The girl bends her head, but the woman drops to the floor with a sharp ‘ No, no,’ and hides her face in the girl’s gown, with the tears streaming down her cheeks.

They talk late, and the girl soothes her. She promises not to drink for the remaining days, and a spark of hope flickers up in her weak soul, and the girl, to whom no one any longer speaks, spends most of her time with her.

Saturday morning early they go up on deck and watch the fleet of fishing smacks, with their ochre-red sails, and the low land, shrouded in silver mists, that looks as if a big wave might wash it away. And the sound of bells floats out to them, and further up the river the blast of foghorns, and

the shriek of whistles, and the rumbling hum of the city mingle in a great symphony. The beasts below divine the nearness of land in some subtle way ; perhaps they scent the brackish grass, for they low deeply ; and the steamer creeps steadily up the Thames with the warehouses looming at its waters' side, as the spectre buildings in a land of shadow.

They watch it together. Her long travelling cloak barely covers her light gown, though the girl has pinned it up. Tears and emotions have chastened her face and effaced the traces of passion and debauch. She is filled with good intentions and the hope of a chance to do better. She trembles a little as they near the dock, and scans the little crowd that awaits them.

'No,' she says, 'he is not there !'

A youth, a typical London clerk, with knowing eyes and assured manner, is one of the first to come on deck. He inquires for Mrs. Grey, hands her a letter and waits. She turns her back to the inquisitive gaze of the stewardess and women, opens it and reads ; and the girl watches her with a feeling of trouble. It crosses her mind as she watches her, that she has often scoffed at novelists, when they spoke of people turning to stone, but that now she realises the meaning ; for there is a curious change in the woman's face ; it is grey, and hard, as if every atom of life and feeling are being killed by the action of some petrifying fluid, working from inside ; and the gold of her hair seems to stand out from it as a wig on a

stone face, and her flesh changes to what children call ‘goose skin.’

She folds the letter carefully ; turns, grips the girl’s arm, and says thickly :

‘It’s no good, I can’t do it—I know myself too well, it is impossible—I am lost. This letter, this simple written thing, has damned me as surely as if I were already in hell. If,—with a sudden gust of passion shaking her from head to foot—‘if I knew the address of a good fast house, I’d drive straight to it ; you are a good, good woman, but say goodbye to me now, and God, if there be such a being’—with a little laugh—‘bless you! But if ever you meet me, if ever you see me in the street or elsewhere, never speak to me, or try to stop me, for if you do, by Christ, I’ll throw myself under the first horse’s feet.’

‘Come downstairs, Edith, I can’t let you go so,’ pleads the girl, and she leads her by the hand. They pass through the crowd that scans their stricken faces curiously, and the girl takes the letter and reads it. It is cold, pitiless, the letter of a man with iron will, wounded in his pride. She is to go with bearer to his lawyer’s, he will tell her what she is to do. She need not write to him, for he will be on his way to China when this reaches her. All her future good treatment will depend on her implicit obedience. She will be driven to rooms and supplied with all necessities ; but, she is not to write to any one, or see any one, neither must she go out except under the escort of the woman in charge of her ; and if she require money she must state in writing to his solicitor for

what purpose. If at the end of three months, her behaviour has been satisfactory, he will consider what steps to take for her future.

No fanatical inquisitor of the middle ages, acquainted with the secret recesses of the human soul, knowing where to touch the most sensitive place, could have calculated more fiendishly.

The girl's heart burns as she reads; she knows it is the death sentence of the woman standing with the hardness of despair on her set face. She has probed into the depths of her nature, and she sees the impossibility of it. Yet she says, feeling the want of conviction in her own words :

' You must try to do it—it is hard—cruelly hard, but you must try to endure it.'

And for answer the woman laughs, and at that the girl breaks down and pats her cold hands, only to drop them and throw her arms round her, pleading :

' When you have seen this man, if you can't do it, wire to me, won't you promise me, Edith dear? Promise to send for me, I'll come, indeed I will, no matter where you are. I'll wait all day and Monday too for a message, only promise! '

The woman takes her face, and framing it with her hands says :

' Forget me, little sister, good, kind little sister, except when you pray. And now kiss me good-bye.'

They kiss one another, the girl with tears drenching her face, and the woman goes up, and she and the youth walk down the gangway and

she never looks back once, though the girl strains her eyes to see the last of her. And when the weary customs have been gone through, the women, seeing the girl had bidden her good-bye, come and advise her for her good to be careful. She repulses them savagely, for she is unstrung and her heart burns hotly ; but when the little maiden ladies come timidly, with chaste tears in their eyes, perhaps for the sake of these she says more gently to them :

‘She is a lost soul, *I* tried to do what I could for her. You are old, the others were married, you had nothing to lose, and yet you held back. It is good, untempted women like you, whose virtue makes you selfish, who help to keep women like her as they are.’

She waited anxiously for a message; none came. Gradually her new work engrossed her thoughts, only sometimes when the bus that carried her home after a late day’s work pulled up in Leicester Square, that rendezvous of leering, silk-hatted satyrs and flaunting nymphs of the pavement, where the frou-frou of silk mingles with the ring of artificial laughter, the glitter of paste with the hectic of paint, where the very air is tainted with patchouli, and souls sensitive to the psychometry of things shiver with the feel of passional atoms vibrating through the atmosphere of the great pairing ground of this city of smug outer propriety; sometimes there, where the foot-walk is crowded with the ‘fallen leaves’ of fairest and frailest

womanhood, like wild rose leaves blown by a wanton wind into a sty, she would think of her again ; then she would scan fearlessly the faces of the women who thronged there with dreadful asking eyes ; and every gleam of golden hair would set her heart throbbing, to recognise with relief it is not *hers*. The dreadful problem of her fate, and the ultimate fate of all these others would weigh on the soul of the girl ; and the question of the justice of the arrangement beat insistently in her tired brain, and the hateful query force itself, With how many of them is this life just selection ?

And so three years passed on and brought her a measure of success, and the content patient work sometimes brings. People said she was better looking—she was simply better dressed. She was not the less lonely, not the less sad, for her sympathy with human suffering was no wise blunted, her sense of its inevitability perhaps increased. Fanciful folk who met her in the streets, such as poets and painters and Irishmen, drew inspiration from her sombre gaze and tender mouth.

Then one bitter winter's day as she stands waiting for her bus in Cornhill, a novelty vendor, a man with a strident voice, shrieks in her ear : 'Ave you seen the larfin' baiby ? Only one penny ! See the larfin' baiby ! They *all* larf ! 'ow to maike the baiby larf ! Wot a baiby !'

She boards her bus with the words ringing in her brain, and out of the jangled echoes a memory rises, bringing *her* face.

'Perhaps I shall see her,' she muses, for it is odd that when a person one has forgotten completely crops up in one's mind, and one wonders why one thinks of them on this particular day, a turn of a street corner sometimes brings an answer in person.

Late that night she says good-bye to a friend at the door of the College of Medicine for women, and turns her steps towards her lodgings. It has been raining, and the streets are encrusted with glass-like particles of frozen snow, a searching north-east wind rattles the blackened branches of the skeleton trees, and chills the thinly clad to the marrow. A fit of desperate coughing draws her attention to a woman holding on to the railings opposite; the abject misery of the shaken figure awakes her keenest pity. As the last hollow cough dies out in a moan, the woman clutches her breast and groans out a curse on her misery and shuffles on. Her rain-soaked skirt clings to her legs, a piece of torn frill at the back drabbles in the mud, and slops round her feet at every step. The tattered remains of a smartly cut summer jacket is her only wrap, except a dishevelled rag of a feather boa that flutters futilely in the wind, and yet there is a trace of the peculiar grace that accompanies perfect proportion of limbs.

Obeying an uncontrollable impulse, the girl turns back and follows her. As the woman passes the gates of the old graveyard where a daughter of Cromwell sleeps under a conical stone, and children peg tops round forgotten graves, the hanging lamp of the Baptist Chapel

next the entrance flickers over her, and the glint of golden hair under a ragged old toque catches the girl's eye and sends her heart fluttering to her throat. She hurries on, determined to pass her, to make sure, and then wait for her ; she is breathless with suspense, she sees her plainly as she pauses under the lamp at the corner of Compton Street, and a stifled cry of horror bursts through the girl's lips.

What a wreck ! What a face ! What a mask of the tragedy of passion, and sin, and the anguish of despair ! Phthisis and drink have run riot together ; have wasted her frame, hollowed her cheeks, puffed her eyelids, dried the dreadful purple lips and soddened the soul within. The girl follows the shambling steps with dry wide eyes and painful heart thud. A loafer at the other corner says something to the woman as she passes, she answers him with a toss of head, and a peal of ribald laughter, that is worse to hear than a tortured cry ; it brings on another fit of coughing, and the pity of it stirs the girl's heart again, and the feeling of sudden loathing that has possessed her gives way to a diviner impulse of compassion.

She hurries on, crosses over, and, turning back, meets her ; there is barely a yard between them, her face is alight with tender feeling ; the woman looks up and sees her ; she pauses for the space of a second with a vivid brightening of her dull eyes, as when one strikes a light in a darkened room ; then, as the eager 'Edith, sister !' reaches her, she flings up one arm wildly to hide her face, thrusts

out the other to ward the girl off and sobs out, 'Oh, oh, no not that!' with a wailing moan. Then she swerves quickly into the street, still shielding her face, and breaks into a mad run; her wet skirt impedes her wavering steps and her poor rags flutter in the sharp wind, and, maddened by memory perhaps, she utters a shriek that startles the passers-by and brings faces to the upper windows, and cuts into the girl's soul to haunt it ever more like the fancied echo of the laughter of hell.

A policeman at the turn to Harrison Street walks towards her as he hears it; she screams hoarsely at him with the defiance of reckless despair, twice, thrice, never slackening her speed; further on, at a turning near Gray's Inn Road, she stumbles, and falls heavily, but she picks herself up with lightning speed and scuds on again with a cough-broken curse; the girl halts when she reaches the corner where the woman fell in her flight, and peers down the dark street. It seems to her that it yawns like a long narrow grave or the passage to a charnel house. The only sign of life in it is a famished cat scraping at something in a rubbish heap. She has disappeared into the night as she came, into the night of despair that leads to death; and as the girl stepped back her foot struck against something, and stooping she picked it up—a frayed, mud-soaked, satin shoe—it is small, and once was a delicate rose.

To her to whom life had brought a deep understanding of its misery and makeshifts, it is a mute

epitome of a tragedy of want ; and through her great agony of distress the narrow practical question forced itself in a comically persistent way : Had the poor weary foot without this frail covering even the sorry shelter of a stocking to protect it ? And facing homewards through the biting wind, with the lamp gleams shining through the dusky mists of the London night, like gorse blooms when the valley is in shadow, she holds it to her breast. What fell upon it as she turned ? A raindrop or a tear ?

WEDLOCK

TWO bricklayers are building a yellow brick wall to the rear of one of a terrace of new jerry-built houses in a genteel suburb. At their back is the remains of a grand old garden. Only the unexpired lease saves it from the clutch of the speculator. An apple-tree is in full blossom, and a fine elm is lying on the grass, sawn down, as it stood on the boundary of a 'desirable lot'; many fair shrubs crop up in unexpected places, a daphne-mezereum struggles to reddens its berries amid a heap of refuse thrown out by the caretakers; a granite urn, portions of a deftly carven shield, a mailed hand and a knight's casque, relics of some fine old house demolished to accommodate the ever-increasing number of the genteel, lie in the trampled grass. The road in front is scarcely begun, and the smart butchers' carts sink into the soft mud and red brick-dust, broken glass, and shavings; yet many of the houses are occupied, and the unconquerable London soot has already made some of the cheap 'art' curtains look dingy. A brass plate of the 'Prudential Assurance Company' adorns the gate of Myrtle House; 'Collegiate School for Young Ladies' that of Evergreen Villa. Victoria, Albert, and Alexandra figure in ornamental letters over the stained-

glass latticed square of three pretentious houses, facing Gladstone, Cleopatra, and Lobelia. The people move into 26 to the ring of carpenters' hammers in 27, and 'go carts,' perambulators, and half-bred fox terriers impede the movements of the men taking in the kitchen boiler to 28.

One of the men, a short, wiry-looking man of fifty, with grizzled sandy hair and a four days growth of foxy beard on his sharp chin, is whistling 'Barbara Allen' softly as he pats down a brick and scrapes the mortar neatly off the joinings. The other, tall and swarthy, a big man with a loose mouth and handsome wicked eyes and a musical voice, is looking down the lane-way leading to a side street.

'Ere she comes, the lydy wot owns this 'ere desirable abode. I want 'er to lend me a jug. Wo-o-a hup, missis! Blind me tight if she ain't as boozed as they makes 'em! Look at 'er, Seltzer; ain't she a beauty, ain't she a sample of a decent bloke's wife! She's a fair sickener, she iz. Hy, 'old 'ard! She dunno where she are!' with a grin.

But the woman, reeling and stumbling up the lane, neither hears nor sees; she is beyond that. She feels her way to the back-yard door of the next house, and, rocking on her feet, tries to find the pocket of her gown. She is much under thirty, with a finely-developed figure. Her gown is torn from the gathers at the back and trails down, showing her striped petticoat; her jacket is of good material, trimmed with silk, but it is dusty

and lime-marked. Her face is flushed and dirty ; her light golden-brown fringe stands out straight over her white forehead ; her bonnet is awry on the back of her head ; her watch dangles from the end of a heavy gold chain, and the buttons of her jersey bodice gape open where the guard is passed through ; she has a basket on her left arm. She clutches the wall and fumbles stupidly for the key, mumbling unintelligibly, and trying with all her might to keep her eyes open. The tall man watches her with ill-concealed disgust, and tosses a pretty coarse jest to her. The sandy man lays down his trowel and wipes his hands on his apron, and goes to her.

‘Lookin’ for yer key, missis ? Let me ‘elp yer ; two ‘eads is better nor one enny day !’

‘Ca’an fin’ it. M’m a bad wom—a bad wom—um,’ she says, shaking her head solemnly at him, with heavy lids and distended pupils.

Meanwhile he has searched her pocket and opened the basket—nothing in it except a Family Novelette and a few gooseberries in a paper bag. He shakes his head, saying to himself : ‘Dropped her marketing. It ain’t here, missis ; sure you took it with ye ?’

She nods stupidly and solemnly three times.

‘Got the larchkey o’ the fron’ door ?’ queries the other.

She frowns, tries to pull up her skirt to get at her petticoat pocket, and lurches over.

‘Old ‘ard, missis, ‘old ‘ard. Throw them long legs o’ yourn across the wall, maite, an’ see if ye

carn't let 'er in !' says the little man, catching her deftly. The other agrees, and the key grates in the lock inside and he opens the door.

'She took the key an' lorst it, that's wot she did. She's a nice ole cup o' tea ; she's a 'ot member for a mile, she iz, an' no mistaike !' and he takes up his trowel and a brick, singing with a sweet tenor.

The little man helps her into the house through the hall into the parlour. He unties her bonnet-strings, pulls off her jacket, and puts her into an arm-chair.

'Ye jist 'ave a sleep, an' ye 'll be all right !'

She clutches at his hand in a foolish sort of way, and her eyes fill with tears.

'Ands orf, missis, 'ands orf, ye jist go to sleep !'

He halts in the kitchen and looks about him. It is very well furnished ; the table is littered with unwashed breakfast things on trays—handsome china, plate, and table-napkins, all in confusion. He shakes his head, puts some coal in the range, closes the door carefully, and goes back to his work.

'Well, did ye put beauty to bed ?' laughs the big man. 'I'd rather Jones owned 'er nor me. 'E picked a noice mother fur iz kids 'e did ! Yes, them three little nippers wot come out a wile ago is iz.'

'E must be pretty tidy orf,' says the little man ; 'it looks very nice in there, an' seemin'ly the 'ole 'ouse is fitted up alike—pianner an' carpets an' chiffoneers.'

'Oh, Jones iz all right. 'E's a cute chap iz Jones. 'E's got a 'ell of a temper, that's all. 'E's bin barman at the Buckin'am for close twenty year ; makes a book an' keeps iz eyes peeled. Bless ye, I know Jones since I woz a lad ; iz first wife woz a sort o' cousin o' my missis—a clever woman too. 'E took this 'un 'cos 'e thort e'd maike a bit out o' gentlemen lorgers, she bein' a prize cook an' 'e 'avin' the 'ouse out of a buildin' society, an' be a mother to the kids as well. She'll keep no lorgers she won't, an' she's a fair beauty for the kids. If she woz mine'—tapping a brick—'I'd bash 'er 'ed in !'

'Maybe ye wouldn't !' says the little man ; 'thet iz if ye understood. Wot if it ain't 'er fault ?'

'Ain't 'er fault ! Ooze iz it then ?'

'That I ain't prepared to say, not knowin' circumstances ; but it might be as it runs in 'er family.'

'Well, I'm blowed, I often 'eerd' (with a grin, showing all his white teeth) 'o' wooden legs runnin' that way, but I never 'eerd tell o' gin !'

'Ye ain't a readin' man I take it,' says the little man, with a touch of superiority, 'I thought that way onst meself. My ole woman drinks.' (He says it as if stating a casual fact that calls for no comment.) 'It woz then I came acorrst a book on "'ereditty," wot comes down from parents to children, ye know, an' I set to findin' all about 'er family. I took a 'eap o' trouble about it, I did, I wanted to do fair by 'er. An' then sez I to meself : "Sam, she carn't 'elp it no more nor the colour of

'er 'air, an' that woz like a pine shavin' in sunshine. 'Er gran'father 'e drunk 'issel dead, an' then iz wife she reared my girl's mother for service—she woz cook at an 'otel in Aylesbury. Well, she married the boots ; they 'ad a tidy bit saved, an' they took a country public with land an' orchard an' such like an' they did well for a long time. Then 'e took to liquor. I never could find out iz family 'istory ; maybe as 'ow 'e couldn't 'elp it neither. 'E woz a Weller, an' she jined 'im arter a bit, which considerin' 'er father woz to be expected. My ole woman often told me 'ow she an' 'er brother used to 'ide out many a night in the orchard. Well they bust up an' 'e got notice to quit, an' wot does 'e do but goes an' 'angs 'issel to a willer next the well, an' she goes out to git a pail o' water an' finds 'im. That set 'er orf wuss nor ever, an' then she went orf sudden like with a parrylittic stroke. Some laidies took the children an' put 'em to school.' (He works steadily as he speaks.) 'Well, one bank 'oliday twenty-eight year come Whitsun' same date izzackly, I went down with a mate o' mine to an uncle of 'iz in Aylesbury ; 'e 'ad a duck farm, an' I seed 'er. She woz as pretty as paint, an' there woz as much difference between 'er an' city girls, as new milk an' chalk an' water. I woz doin' well, times woz better ; I 'ave three trades, when one iz slack I works at another. I got work down there an' we kep' company, an' got our 'ome together, an' woz married, an' woz az 'appy az might be for six year. Then our eldest little lad 'e set 'issel afire

one day she woz out, an' they took 'im to the infirmary, but 'e died in a 'our, a' wen we went to fetch 'im 'ome 'e woz rolled in wite bandages most like one o' them mummies in the British Museum. It went to my girl's 'eart like, for she couldn't seem to recognise 'im nohow. An' 'twoz arter that I begin to notice she took a drop. At fust I woz real mad, I gave 'er a black eye onst; but then I came acrorst that book—I woz allus a man for readin'—an' I found out about 'er folk, an' I see az 'ow she couldn't 'elp it. It got worser an' worser an' arter two years we come up to town; I couldn't stand the shame of it. Then I went down to my ole mother; she woz livin' with a widowed sister in Kent, an' I up an' told 'er: I sez, "Mother, ye got to take the kids. I ain't goin' to 'ave no more with the curse on 'em, an' I ain't goin' to 'ave 'em spoiled," an' I took 'em down an' sent 'er money regular, bad times same az good. She went on dreadful at first; I gave 'er a fair chance, I took 'er down to see 'em, and sez I: "Knock off the drink, ole girl, an' ye 'az 'em back!" She tried it, I really believe she did, but bless ye she couldn't, it woz in 'er blood same az the colourin' of 'er skin. I gave up 'ome then, wen she gets right mad she'd pawn everything in the show; I allus puts my own things in a Monday morning an' takes 'em out a Saturday night, it keeps 'em safe. The landlady looks arter 'er own, an' so she ain't got much to dispose on. I carn't abide liquor meself, though I don't 'old with preachin' about it; an' that's wy they call

me Seltzer Sam, and wy I gets my dinner in a cookshop.'

The little man is laying his bricks carefully one on top of the other.

' You spoke sort o' sharp to your missis to-day, cos she woz a bit laite, an' I thort as 'ow ye woz uncommon lucky to 'ave 'er come nice and tidy with it—it's twenty years since I woz brought me dinner in a basin.'

There's a silence. The big man looks thoughtful, then he says suddenly :

' Well I couldn't do it, I couldn't do it, that's all I sez. Wy don't ye put 'er away someweres ? '

' I did, but lor, it woz no manner o' good. I allus fancied she'd set 'erself o' fire or fall in the street or somethink an' get took to the station on a stretcher with the boys a' callin' "meat" arter 'er, an' I couldn't sleep for thinkin' of it, so I fetched 'er back. We woz very 'appy for six year, an' thet's more nor some folk az in all their lives, an'—with a quaint embarrassment—she were the only woman as ever I keered for, right from the fust minute I seed 'er 'oldin' a big bunch o' poppies an' that grass they call "wag wantons" down there, in 'er 'and, as pretty as a picture—an' I *didn't marry 'er cos she could cook*, that's no wearin' reason to marry a woman for, leastwise not for me. An' I wouldn't 'ave the children—I call 'em children, though, lor bless yer, they're grown up and doin' well—I wouldn't 'ave 'em think I'd turned their mother out o' doors—no'—with an emphatic dab of mortar—'no, 'er fate's

my fate, an' I ain't the kind o' chap to turn the ole woman out for what she can by no manner o' means 'elp!' and he puts another brick neatly on the top of the last and scrapes the oozing mortar.

The big man rubs the back of his hand across his eyes, and says with a gulp :

'Shake 'ands, mate, damme if I know wot to call yer, a bloomin' archangel or a blasted softy.'

The woman lay as he left her, with her feet thrust out in her half-buttoned boots, and her hands hanging straight down. The sun crept round the room, and at length a clock chimed four strokes up on the drawing-room floor. A woman sitting writing at a table between the window looks up with a sigh of relief, and moistens her lips ; they are dry. A pile of closely written manuscript lies on the floor beside her ; she drops each sheet as she finishes it.

She is writing for money, writing because she must, because it is the tool given to her wherewith to carve her way ; she is nervous, overwrought, every one of her fingers seems as if it had a burning nerve-knot in its tip ; she has thrust her slippers aside, for her feet twitch ; she is writing feverishly now, for she has been undergoing the agony of a barren period for some weeks, her brain has seemed arid as a sand plain, not a flower of fancy has sprung up in it ; she has felt in her despair as if she were hollowed out, honeycombed by her emotions, and she has cried over her mental

sterility. Her measure of success has come to her, her public waits, what if she have nothing to give them? The thought has worn her, whispered to her in dreams at night, taken the savour out of her food by day. But this morning a little idea came and grew, grew so blessedly, and she has been working since early day. Her landlady has forgotten her luncheon; she never noticed the omission, but now she feels her frail body give way under the strain; she will finish this chapter and have some tea. She has heard steps below. She writes until the half-hour strikes, then drops the last sheet of paper with a sobbing sigh of relief. She pulls the bell sharply and sits waiting patiently. No one answers it. She rings again; there is a crash downstairs as of china falling with a heavy body, and a smothered groan. She trembles, listens, and then goes down.

The woman is lying in the doorway of the sitting-room, a small table with broken glass and wax flowers on the floor near her. She hides her face as she hears the light step.

‘Did you hurt yourself? can I help you?’

She drags her up, supports her into the bedroom and on to the unmade bed, and goes out into the kitchen. A look of weary disgust crosses her face as she sees the litter on the table. There is a knock at the back door, she opens it; three children peer cautiously in, keen-eyed London children with precocious knowledge of the darker sides of life. They enter holding one another’s

hands. The eldest signs to the others to sit down, steals up the passage, peers through the slit of the door, and returns with a satisfied look and nods to the others.

'Your mother is not well, I am afraid,' the woman says timidly, she is nervous with children. The three pairs of eyes examine her slowly to see if she is honest.

'Our mother is in heaven!' says the boy as if repeating a formula. 'That's our stepmother, and she's boozed!'

'Johnny!' calls the woman from the inner room. The boy's face hardens into a sullen scowl, and she notices that he raises his hand involuntarily as if to ward off a blow, and that the smaller ones change colour and creep closer to one another. He goes to her—there is a murmur of voices.

'She sez I'm to get your tea!' he remarks as he comes out, and stirs up the dying fire. 'Ain't you 'ad nothin' since mornin'?' .

She evades the question by asking: 'Have you children had anything?'

'We took some bread with us.' He opens a purse.

'There's nothin' in it, an' father gave 'er 'arf a sovereign this mornin'!'

'I will give you some money if you come upstairs, and then you can get my tea.'

The boy is deft-handed, prematurely cute, with a trick of peering under his lashes. It annoys her,

and she is relieved when she has had her tea and got rid of him. She is restless, upset, she feels this means moving again. What a weary round a working woman's life is! She is so utterly alone. The silence oppresses her, the house seems filled with whispers ; she cannot shake off this odd feeling, she felt it the first time she entered it ; the rooms were pretty, and she took them, but this idea is always with her.

She puts on her hat and goes out, down the half-finished road and into a lighted thoroughfare. Costers' carts are drawn up alongside the pavement ; husbands and wives with the inevitable perambulator are pricing commodities ; girls are walking arm in arm, tossing back a look or a jest to the youths as they pass. The accents of the passers-by, the vociferous call of the vendors, the jostling of the people jar on her ; she turns back with tears in her eyes. Her loneliness strikes doubly home to her, and she resolves to join a woman's club ; anything to escape it. She pauses near the door to get her latchkey, and notices the boy at the side entrance. He draws back into the shade as he sees her. She stands at her window and looks out into the murky summer night ; a man comes whistling down the street ; the boy runs to meet him, she sees him bend his head to catch the words better and then they turn back. She lights the gas and tries to read, she dreads the scenes she feels will follow, and she trembles when the door slams below and steps echo down the passage.

There is the low growl of the man's voice and the answers of the woman's, then both rise discordantly—a stifled scream and a heavy fall, footsteps down the passage, the bang of a door, and both voices raised in altercation, with the boy's voice striking shrilly in between—a blow, a crash of china and glass, then stillness. She is breathless with excitement; the quiet is broken by a sound of scuffling in the passage; he is going to put her out. Drag, and shove, and the scraping of feet, and the sullen 'you dare, you dare' of the woman, in reply to his muttered threats. She goes to the top of the stairs and cries:

'Don't hurt her, wait until morning to reason with her, don't hurt her!'

'Reason with '*er*, miss! There ain't no way of reasoning with the likes of '*er*, chuck '*er* out is the only way. Would ye, would ye? Ye drunken beast!—'

The woman and the man sway together in the passage and her bodice is torn open at the breast and her hair is loose, and she loses her footing and falls as he drags her towards the door. She clutches at the chairs and brass umbrella-stand and drags them down; and the woman, watching, rushes upstairs and buries her face in the sofa cushions. Then the door bangs to and the woman outside rings and knocks and screams; windows open and heads peer out; then the boy lets her in and there seems to be a truce.

A charwoman brings her breakfast next morning, and it is tea-time before she sees *her*. She

has on a clean pink cotton gown and her hair is nicely done and her skin looks very pink and white ; but her eyes are swollen, and there is a bruise on one temple and a bad scratch on her cheek. She hangs her head sullenly and loiters with the tea-things ; then she goes over to her and stands with her eyes on the ground and her hair glittering like golden down on the nape of her thick neck in the light from the window at her back.

'I am sorry for yesterday, miss, it was bad of me, but you won't go away ? I won't do it again. Take it off the rent, only forgive me, won't you, miss ?'

She is flushing painfully ; her face is working, perhaps it seems worse because it is a heavily moulded face and it does not easily express emotions. It has the attractive freshness of youth and vivid colouring.

'We won't say anything more about it. I am so sorry ; I am not used to scenes and it made me quite ill ; I was frightened, I thought you would be hurt.'

The woman's face changes and as she raises her heavy white lids her eyes seem to look crosswise with a curious gleam in them and her voice is hoarse.

'That little beast told him, the little sneak ! But I 'll pay him for it, I 'll pay him !'

An uneasy dislike stirs in the woman ; she says very quietly :

'But you can't expect a man to come home and find you so and then be pleased.'

'No, but he shouldn't——' she checks herself and passes her hand across her forehead. The other woman observes her closely as she does most things—as material. It is not that her sympathies are less keen since she took to writing, but that the habit of analysis is always uppermost. She sees a voluptuously made woman, with a massive milk-white throat rising out of the neck of her pink gown; her jaw is square and prominent, her nose short and straight, her brows traced distinctly; she is attractive and repellent in a singular way.

'You don't know what works in me, miss——' She says no more, but it is evident that something is troubling her and that she is putting restraint on herself. Late in the evening, when the children are in bed, she hears her go up to their room; there is a sound of quick blows and a frightened whimper; and the next morning she is roused from her sleep by a child's scream and the woman's voice uttering low threats:

'Will you be quiet?' (whimper) 'will you be quiet? I'll teach you to make a row' (more stifled, frightened cries), and she feels in some subtle way that the woman is smothering the child in the bed-clothes. It worries her, and she never looks up at her when she brings her breakfast. The latter feels it and watches her furtively. At lunch time it strikes her that she has been drinking again; she musters heart of grace and says to her:

'You promised to be good, Mrs. Jones. It

seems to me to be such a pity that you should drink, why do you? You are very young!'

Her voice is naturally tender, and her words have an unexpected effect; the woman covers her face with her hands and rocks her shoulders. Suddenly she cries:

'I don't know; I get thinkin'; I 'ave 'ad a trouble. I never knew a woman drink for the love of it like men, there's most always a cause. Don't think me a bad woman, miss, I ain't really, only I 'ave a trouble.' She talks hurriedly as if she can't help herself, as if the very telling is a necessity. 'I 'ad a little girl' (dropping her voice) 'before I was married—she's turned three, she's such a dear little thing, you never seen such 'air, miss, it's like floss silk an' 'er eyes are china blue, an' 'er lashes are that long'—measuring a good inch on her finger—'an' 'er skin is milk-white. I keep wantin' 'er all the time——' The tears fill her eyes and splash out. 'I was cook in a big business house, an' 'e was the 'ead of it—I was cruel fond of 'im. Then when my time came I went 'ome to my step-sister an' she nursed me. I paid 'er, an' then when I went out to service again she took 'er. I used to see 'er onst or twice a week. But she was fonder of 'er nor me, an' I couldn't bear it, it made me mad, I was jealous of every one as touched 'er. Then Jones, 'e woz always after me, 'e knew about it, an' 'e promised me that I could 'ave 'er if I married 'im. I didn't want to marry, I only wanted 'er, an' I couldn't 'ave 'er with me, an' 'e promised'—with resentful emphasis—'e

swore as 'ow I could 'ave 'er. I took 'im on that an' 'e kep' puttin' me off, an' when I went to see 'er, 'e quarrelled, an' once when she was ill 'e wouldn't let me send 'er any money though 'e 'ad wot I saved when I married 'im—it just made me 'ate 'im—I see 'er so seldom, an' she calls '*er* mammy, it most kills me—I feel my 'ead burstin'—an' 'e laughed when I told 'im I wouldn't 'ave married 'im only for 'er sake!'

'Poor thing, it is hard, he ought to have kept his promise to you when he made it. Haven't you told him you wouldn't drink if you had her with you?'

'Where's the good? 'E says 'e never meant to keep it; as a man ain't such a fool as to keep a promise 'e makes a woman just to get 'er. 'E knows it sets me off, but 'e's that jealous that 'e can't abear 'er name. 'E says I would neglect 'is children, an' 'e called 'er names an' says 'e won't 'ave no bastard round with 'is children. That made me 'ate 'em first, nasty yellow things—'

'Yes, but the poor children are not to blame for it?'

'No, but they remind me of 'er, an' I 'ate the very sight of 'em.' There is such concentrated hatred in her voice that the woman shrinks. 'I ain't 'ad any money to send 'er this long time, but my sister's 'usband is as fond of 'er as 'is own; they 'ave seven of their own. I 'ate to see things in the shop windows, I used to keep 'er so pretty. I got a letter a while ago sayin' she wasn't very

well, an' that set me off. You've spoken kind to me since you've been here, that's w'y I tell you, you won't think worse of me now than I deserve.'

She clears away the things sullenly, with her jaw set, and the strange oblique light flickering in her eyes. It oppresses the other woman; she feels as if she is facing one of those lurid tragedies that outsiders are powerless to prevent. This woman with her fierce devotion to the child of the man who betrayed her; her marriage, into which she has been cheated by a promise never meant to be kept; and the step-children fanning her fierce dislike by the very childish attributes that waken love in other circumstances. She stays a week longer, but every whimper of the children, every fresh outburst wears upon her, and she leaves, not without speaking with all the earnestness and sympathy of her nature to the woman of whose fate she has an oppressive, inexplicable presentiment.

The tears in her eyes at leaving have touched the girl, for she is little more, and she has promised to try and be better, as she childishly puts it. Things have gone pleasantly for some days, and she has been patient with the children. One of them has been ill and she has nursed it, and to-day she has made them an apple-cake and sent them to the park, and she is singing to herself over her work; she is cleaning out her bed-room. It is Derby Day. He has the day off, and has gone to the races. He gave her five shillings

before he started in the morning, telling her she might send it to the 'young 'un.'

It touched her, and she brushed his coat and kissed him of her own accord. She has felt kindly to him all the morning for it. She notices a button dangling off his working coat and takes it out to the kitchen to sew it on ; he seldom brings it home. There is nothing in the pockets except a slip of 'events' cut out of some sporting paper ; but the lining of the breast-pocket is torn, and as she examines it, the rustle of paper catches her ear. She smiles ; what if it is a 'fiver'? She knows all about his betting. She slips two fingers down between the lining and works it up—a telegram. She still smiles, for she thinks she will find a clue to some of his winnings. She opens it, and reads, and her face changes ; the blood rushes to it, until a triangular vein stands out on her forehead like a purple whipcord. Her throat looks as if it would burst ; a pulse beats in her neck ; her upper lip is completely sucked in by the set line of her under one, and her eyes positively squint. A fly that keeps buzzing on the pane rouses her to such a pitch, that she seizes a boot off the table and sends it crashing through the pane of glass into the yard, liberating the fly at the same time. Then she tries to re-read it, but there is a red blaze before her eyes. She goes out, up the lane, towards the unfinished houses, to where the bricklayers are at work, and hands it to the little man, saying hoarsely :

'Read it, I 'm dazed, I can't see it rightly.'

The big man stops whistling and looks curiously at her. She is perfectly sober; the flush has ceded to a lead-white pallor, and her face twitches convulsively. She stands absolutely still, with her hands hanging heavily down, though she is devoured with impatience. The little man wipes his hands, and takes out his spectacles, and reads slowly :

‘Susie dying, come at once, no hope. Expecting you since Saturday, wrote twice.’

A minute’s silence—then a hoarse scream that seems to come from the depths of her chest; it frightens both men, so that the big man drops a brick, and a carpenter in the house comes to the window and looks out.

‘Since Saturday!’ she cries, ‘to-day is Wednesday. When was it sent, tell me!’ she shakes the little man in her excitement, and he scans the form slowly, with the deliberation of his class :

‘Stratford, 7.45.’

‘But the date! the date, man!’

‘The 20th.’

‘To-day,’ with a groan, ‘is the 22nd. So it come Monday, and to-day is Wednesday, an’ they wrote twice. It must ‘ave come when I fetched ‘is beer, an’ ‘e kept it. But the letters?—that little cub, that sneak of ‘ell! Aah, wait!’ She calls down curses with such ferocity of expression, that the men shiver; then crushing the fateful paper inside the bosom of her gown, she rushes back, and in a few minutes they see her come out, tying on her bonnet as she runs.

'Well, this 'ere's a rum go, eh?' says the big man, regaining his colour, 'an' ooze Susie?'

The little man says nothing, only balances a brick in the palm of his hand before he fits it into its place, but his lips move silently.

In the parlour of one of a row of stiff two-storied houses, with narrow hall-doors in a poor street in Stratford, a little coffin painted white is laid on the table that is covered with a new white sheet.

There are plenty of flowers, from the white wreath sent by the grocer's wife, with a card bearing 'From a Sympathiser' in big silver letters, to the penny bunch of cornflowers of a playmate.

Susie has her tiny hands folded, and the little waxen face looks grey and pinched amongst the elaborately pinked-out glazed calico frills of her coffin lining. There is the unavoidable air of festivity that every holiday, even a sad one, imparts to a working-man's home. The children have their hair crimped and their Sunday clothes on, for they are going to the burial-ground in a grand coach with black horses and long tails, and they sit on the stairs and talk it over in whispers.

The men have come in at dinner-hour silently and stolidly, and looked at her, and gone out to the 'Dog and Jug' for a glass of beer to wash down whatever of sadness the sight of dead Susie may have roused in them.

Every woman in the row has had a cup of tea, and told of her own sorrows ; related the death of every relative she has ever possessed, to the third and fourth degree, with the minuteness of irrelevant detail peculiar to her class. Every incident of Susie's death-struggle has been described with such morbid or picturesque addition as frequent rehearsals, or the fancy of the narrator, may suggest. Every corner of the house is crammed with people, for the funeral is to leave at three o'clock.

'Looks like satin it do, it's as pretty as ever I see !' pointing to the pinking, says one woman.

'Yes, Mr. Triggs thought a 'eap o' Susie, an' 'e took extra pains. 'E 's a beautiful undertaker, an' 'e 's goin' to send the 'earse with the wite plumes ! Don't she just look a little hangel ?'

So they stream in and out, and in the kitchen a circle of matrons hold a Vehmgericht over the mother.

'She's an unfeelin' brute, even if she iz yer arf sister, Mrs. Waters,' says a fat matron, 'to let that pretty, hinnocent hangel die without seein' 'er, not to speak o' buryin', I 'ave no patience with sich ways !'

The roll of wheels and the jingle of tyres cuts short her speech, and the knocker bangs dully. Heads crane out in every direction, and one of the children opens the door, and the woman steps in.

In her pink gown ! when every one knows that not to pawn your bed or the washing-tubs, or any-

thing available, to get a black skirt or crape bonnet, or at least a straw with bugles, is the greatest breach of propriety known to the poor, the greatest sticklers for mourning etiquette outside a German court. The half-sister is a quiet woman with smoothly parted hair and tender eyes, and a strong likeness to her about the underhung chin. She goes forward and leads her to the room ; the women fall back and talk in whispers.

‘W’y didn’t you send ?’ she asks fiercely, turning from the coffin.

‘We wrote Friday, an’ then, when you didn’t come, we wrote Sunday. Jim couldn’t go, an’ I never left ‘er a minute, an’ Tiny an’ little Jim ’ad the measles, an’ Katie ’ad to mind ‘em ; but a mate o’ Jim’s went to the ‘Buckin’am’ on Monday mornin’ an’ told *’im*, an’ then we sent a tellygram, an’ we couldn’t do more, not if she were our own.’

There is a settled resignation in her voice ; she has repeated it so often.

‘E kep’ the letters an’ e never told me, an’ I only found the tellygram this mornin’ by accidin’. When’s she to be buried ?’

‘At three o’clock,’—with a puzzled look at the set face.

‘Leave me along of ‘er then ; go on !’—roughly.

The woman goes out, closes the door, and listens. Not a sound comes from the room, not one, not a sob nor cry. The women listen in silence when she tells them ; they are used to the fierce passions of humanity, and jealousy is common amongst their men. After a while one of the children says,

with an awe-struck face, ‘Ma, she’s singin’.’ They go to the door and listen ; she is crooning a non-sense song she used to sing to her when she was quite a baby, and the listening women pale, but fear to go in. For a long hour they hear her talking and singing to it ; then the man comes to screw down the lid, and they find her on the sofa with the dead child on her lap, its feet, in their white cotton socks, sticking out like the legs of a great wax doll.

She lets them take it from her without a word, and watches them place it amongst the white frills, and lets them lead her out of the room. She sits bolt upright in the kitchen, with the same odd smile upon her lips and her hands hanging straight down. They go without her. When they return she is still sitting with her hands hanging, as if she has never stirred.

‘Mother, w’y did they plant Susie in the ground ? Mother, carn’t you answer ; will she grow?’ queries one of the children, and something in the question rouses her. She starts up with a cry and a wild glare, and stares about as if in search of something—stands trembling in every limb, with the ugly flush on her face and the purple triangle on her forehead, and the pulse beating in her throat. The children cower away from her, and the sister watches her with frightened, pitying eyes.

‘Sit down, Susan, there’s a dear, sit down an’ ‘ave some tea !’

‘No, I’ve got to go—I’ve got to go—I’ve got t——’ she mutters, swaying unsteadily on her feet.

The words come thickly, and the end of the sentence is lost.

‘She’d be better if she could cry, poor thing !’ says the fat matron.

‘Give ‘er somethink belonged to the young ‘un !’ says a little woman with a black eye. The sister goes to a drawer in the dresser and turns over some odds and ends and finds a necklace of blue beads with a brass clasp, and hands it to her. She takes it with a hoarse cry as of an animal in dire pain, and rocks and moans and kisses it, but no tears come ; and then, before they can realise it, she is out through the passage, and the door slams. When they get to it and look out, she is hurrying wildly down the street, with her pink gown fluttering, and the roses nodding in her bonnet, through a drizzle of soft rain.

Six o’clock rings ; the rain still falls steadily, and, through its dull beat, the splash of big drops on to the new boards in a roofless house, and the blows of a hammer, strike sharply.

‘Comin’, mate ?’ queries the big man. ‘No ? Well, so long !’ He shoulders his straw kit and turns up the collar of his coat and goes off whistling. The little man puts his tools away, fastens a sack about his shoulders and creeps into a square of bricks—they had thrown some loose planks across the top earlier in the day as a sort of protection against the rain ; he lights his pipe and sits patiently waiting for her return. He is hungry, and his wizened face looks pinched in the light

of the match as he strikes it, but he waits patiently.

The shadows have closed in when she gets back, for she has walked all the way from Liverpool Street, unheeding the steady rain that has come with the south-west wind. The people maddened her. She felt inclined to strike them. A fierce anger surged up in her against each girl who laughed, each man who talked of the winner. She felt inclined to spit at them, make faces, or call them names. Her dress is bedabbled, the dye of the roses has soaked through the gold of her fringe and runs down her forehead as if she has a bleeding wound there. The gas is lit in the kitchen, and her tea is laid and the kettle is singing on the stove ; a yellow envelope is lying on the top of the cup ; she opens it and turns up the gas and reads it :

‘ Been in luck to-day, going home with Johnson, back early to-morrow evening.’

She puts it down with a peculiar smile. She has the string of beads in her hand ; she keeps turning them round her finger ; then she steals to the foot of the stairs and listens.

The little man has watched her go in, and stands in the lane-way looking up at the house. A light appears in the top back window, but it must come from the stairs, it is too faint to be in the room itself. He bends his head as if to listen, but the steady fall of the rain and the drip of the roof on to some loose sheets of zinc dominate everything. He walks away a bit and watches a shadow cross

the blinds ; his step crunches on the loose bricks and stones ; a woman rushes down the flagged path of the next house and opens the door.

‘ Is that Mr Sims ? ’

‘ No, ma’am, I’m one of the workmen.’

She has left her kitchen door open, and as the light streams out he can see she is a thin woman with an anxious look.

‘ I thought it was Mr. Sims, the watchman. My baby is threatened with convulsions. I wanted him to run for the doctor at the end of the terrace; I daren’t leave him, and my sister’s lame. Will you go ? it isn’t far ! ’

She is listening, and though he hears nothing, she darts off calling, ‘ There he’s off, do go, *do go*. Say Mrs. Rogers’s baby, Hawthorn House, No. 23.’

He stands a moment irresolute ; the shadow moves across the blind, and a second smaller shadow seems to wave across it ; or was it only the rising wind flicking the blind ? and is it fancy, or did not a stifled cry reach him ; and was it from that room it came or from Mrs. Rogers’s baby ? The little man is shaking with anxiety ; he feels as if some malignant fate in the shape of Mrs. Rogers’s baby is playing tricks with him, to bring about a catastrophe he has stayed to avert. He is torn both ways ; he can offer no excuse for not going ; he dare not explain the secret dread that has kept him here supperless in the rain watching the house where the three motherless children sleep. He turns and runs stumbling over the rubbish into the side street and arrives breath-

less at the corner house where the red lamp burns at the gate—rings—what a time they keep him—it seems ages, and visions keep tumbling kaleidoscopically through his brain ; the very red of the light adds colour to the horrid tragedy he sees enacted in excited fancy.

‘The doctor is out ; won’t be back for some time ; there’s a Dr. Phillips round the corner,’ explains the smart maid—the door slams to.

‘Yes, Dr. Phillips is in ; you must wait a minute,’ ushering him into a waiting-room. He sits on the edge of the chair with his wet hat in his hand. Two other people are waiting : a girl with a swelled face and a sickly-looking man.

A door opens, some one beckons, the man goes in. He looks at the clock—five minutes pass, seven, ten—each seems an hour—fifteen—and the woman’s face as she went in, and the frightened children (his mate questioned them at tea-time), and the shadow on the blind of the room they slept in ! Why should Mrs. Rogers’s baby go and get convulsions just this particular night ? seems as though it were to be—seventeen ; no, he won’t wait any longer. The strange, inexplicable fear clutching the little man’s soul gives him courage, though the well-furnished house awes him ; he slips out into the hall, opens the door, and rings the bell. The same girl answers it.

‘Well I never ! W’y, I just let you in. Carn’t you wait yer turn—the *idea* !’

A pale young man with spectacles coming down the stairs asks :

'What is it you want, my man?' The girl tosses her head and goes downstairs.

'I can't wait, sir; Mrs. Rogers's baby, 'Awthorn 'Ouse, No. 23 Pelham Road, round the corner, got the convulsions. She wants the doctor as soon as 'e can.'

'All right, I'll be round in a second.'

The little man hurries back, trying to add up the time he has been away—twenty-five minutes, it must be twenty-five, perhaps twenty-seven. The yard door of Mrs. Rogers's house is open, and a girl peers out as he runs up the lane.

'The doctor woz out; Dr. Phillips is comin' at onst!' His eyes rest on the window of the next house as he speaks. It is dark up there and silent. He pays no heed to the thanks of the girl, and he hears the tap of her crutch up the flagged path with a gasp of relief.

What has happened whilst he has been away on his errand of mercy? Has anything happened? After all, why should this ghastly idea of a tragedy possess him? He climbs on to a heap of loose bricks and peers over the wall—darkness and silence. He goes down the lane and round to the front of the house. A dim light shines through the stained glass over the door showing up the name 'Ladas,' that is all, yet the little man shivers. The rain has soaked through his coat and is trickling down his neck; he scratches his head in perplexity, muttering to himself, 'I'm afear'd, an' I dunno wot I'm afear'd on. I meant to wotch; maybe arsk 'er for a light. It ain't my fault if

Mrs. Rogers's baby came atween—but twarn't no wearin' reason to marry for,' and he goes down the road and faces home. The rain ceases, and a tearful moon appears, and the water drips off the roof with a clucking sound. Upstairs in a back room in the silent house a pale strip of moonlight flickers over a dark streak on the floor, that trickles slowly from the pool at the bedside out under the door, making a second ghastly pool on the top step of the stairs—a thick sorghum red, blackening as it thickens, with a sickly serous border. Downstairs the woman sits in a chair with her arms hanging down. Her hands are crimson as if she has dipped them in dye. A string of blue beads lies on her lap, and she is fast asleep; and she smiles as she sleeps, for Susie is playing in a meadow, a great meadow crimson with poppies, and her blue eyes smile with glee, and her golden curls are poppy-crowned, and her little white feet twinkle as they dance, and her pinked-out grave frock flutters, and her tiny waxen hands scatter poppies, blood-red poppies, in handfuls over three open graves.

VIRGIN SOIL

THE bridegroom is waiting in the hall; with a trifle of impatience he is tracing the pattern of the linoleum with the point of his umbrella. He curbs it and laughs, showing his strong white teeth at a remark of his best man; then compares the time by his hunter with the clock on the stairs. He is florid, bright-eyed, loose-lipped, inclined to stoutness, but kept in good condition; his hair is crisp, curly, slightly grey; his ears peculiar, pointed at their tops like a faun's. He looks very big and well-dressed, and, when he smiles, affable enough.

Upstairs a young girl, with the suns of seventeen summers on her brown head, is lying with her face hidden on her mother's shoulder; she is sobbing with great childish sobs, regardless of reddened eyes and the tears that have splashed on the silk of her grey, going-away gown.

The mother seems scarcely less disturbed than the girl. She is a fragile-looking woman with delicate fair skin, smoothly parted thin chestnut hair, dove-like eyes, and a monotonous piping voice. She is flushing painfully, making a strenuous effort to say something to the girl, something that is opposed to the whole instincts of her life.

She tries to speak, parts her lips only to close them again, and clasp her arms tighter round the girl's shoulders; at length she manages to say with trembling, uncertain pauses:

' You are married now, darling, and you must obey'—she lays a stress upon the word—' your husband in all things—there are—there are things you should know—but—marriage is a serious thing, a sacred thing'—with desperation—' you must believe that what your husband tells you is right—let him guide you—tell you——'

There is such acute distress in her usually un-emotional voice that the girl looks up and scans her face—her blushing, quivering, faded face. Her eyes are startled, fawn-like eyes as her mother's, her skin too is delicately fair, but her mouth is firmer, her jaw squarer, and her piquant, irregular nose is full of character. She is slightly built, scarcely fully developed in her fresh youth.

' What is it that I do not know, mother? What is it?'—with anxious impatience. ' There is something more—I have felt it all these last weeks in your and the others' looks—in his, in the very atmosphere—but why have you not told me before—I——' Her only answer is a gush of helpless tears from the mother, and a sharp rap at the door, and the bridegroom's voice, with an imperative note that it strikes the nervous girl is new to it, that makes her cling to her mother in a close, close embrace, drop her veil and go out to him.

She shakes hands with the best man, kisses the girl friend who has acted as bridesmaid—the

wedding has been a very quiet one—and steps into the carriage. The Irish cook throws an old shoe after them from the side door, but it hits the trunk of an elder-tree, and falls back on to the path, making that worthy woman cross herself and mutter of ill-omens and bad luck to follow; for did not a magpie cross the path first thing this morning when she went to open the gate, and wasn't a red-haired woman the first creature she clapped eyes on as she looked down the road?

Half an hour later the carriage pulls up at the little station and the girl jumps out first; she is flushed, and her eyes stare helplessly as the eyes of a startled child, and she trembles with quick running shudders from head to foot. She clasps and unclasps her slender, grey-gloved hands so tightly that the stitching on the back of one bursts.

He has called to the station-master, and they go into the refreshment-room together; the latter appears at the door and, beckoning to a porter, gives him an order.

She takes a long look at the familiar little place. They have lived there three years, and yet she seems to see it now for the first time; the rain drips, drips monotonously off the zinc roof, the smell of the dust is fresh, and the white pinks in the borders are beaten into the gravel.

Then the train runs in; a first-class carriage, marked 'engaged,' is attached, and he comes for her; his hot breath smells of champagne, and it strikes her that his eyes are fearfully big and bright, and he offers her his arm with such a

curious amused proprietary air that the girl shivers as she lays her hand in it.

The bell rings, the guard locks the door, the train steams out, and as it passes the signal-box, a large well-kept hand, with a signet ring on the little finger, pulls down the blind on the window of an engaged carriage.

Five years later, one afternoon on an autumn day, when the rain is falling like splashing tears on the rails, and the smell of the dust after rain fills the mild air with freshness, and the white chrysanthemums struggle to raise their heads from the gravel path into which the sharp shower has beaten them, the same woman, for there is no trace of girlhood in her twenty-two years, slips out of a first-class carriage ; she has a dressing-bag in her hand.

She walks with her head down and a droop in her shoulders ; her quickness of step is due rather to nervous haste than elasticity of frame. When she reaches the turn of the road, she pauses and looks at the little villa with the white curtains and gay tiled window-boxes. She can see the window of her old room ; distinguish every shade in the changing leaves of the creeper climbing up the south wall ; hear the canary's shrill note from where she stands.

Never once has she set foot in the peaceful little house with its air of genteel propriety since that eventful morning when she left it with him ; she has always framed an excuse.

Now as she sees it a feeling of remorse fills her heart, and she thinks of the mother living out her quiet years, each day a replica of the one gone before, and her resolve weakens ; she feels inclined to go back, but the waning sun flickers over the panes in the window of the room she occupied as a girl. She can recall how she used to run to the open window on summer mornings and lean out and draw in the dewy freshness and welcome the day, how she has stood on moonlight nights and danced with her bare white feet in the strip of moonlight, and let her fancies fly out into the silver night, a young girl's dreams of the beautiful, wonderful world that lay outside.

A hard dry sob rises in her throat at the memory of it, and the fleeting expression of softness on her face changes to a bitter disillusion.

She hurries on, with her eyes down, up the neat gravelled path, through the open door into the familiar sitting-room.

The piano is open with a hymn-book on the stand ; the grate is filled with fresh green ferns, a bowl of late roses perfume the room from the centre of the table. The mother is sitting in her easy chair, her hands folded across a big white Persian cat on her lap ; she is fast asleep. Some futile lace work, her thimble, and bright scissor are placed on a table near her.

Her face is placid, not a day older than that day five years ago. Her glossy hair is no greyer, her skin is clear, she smiles in her sleep. The smile rouses a sort of sudden fury in the breast of

the woman standing in her dusty travelling cloak at the door, noting every detail in the room. She throws back her veil and goes over and looks at herself in the mirror over the polished chiffonnier—scans herself pitilessly. Her skin is sallow with the dull sallowness of a fair skin in ill-health, and the fringe of her brown hair is so lacking in lustre that it affords no contrast. The look of fawn-like shyness has vanished from her eyes, they burn sombrely and resentfully in their sunken orbits, there is a dragged look about the mouth ; and the keynote of her face is a cynical disillusion. She looks from herself to the reflection of the mother, and then turning sharply with a suppressed exclamation goes over, and shaking the sleeping woman not too gently, says :

- ‘Mother, wake up, I want to speak to you !’

The mother starts with frightened eyes, stares at the other woman as if doubting the evidence of her sight, smiles, then cowed by the unresponsive look in the other face, grows grave again, sits still and stares helplessly at her, finally bursting into tears with a

‘Flo, my dear, Flo, is it really you ?’

The girl jerks her head impatiently and says drily :

‘Yes, that is self-evident. I am going on a long journey. I have something to say to you before I start ! Why on earth are you crying ?’

There is a note of surprised wonder in her voice mixed with impatience.

The older woman has had time to scan her face

and the dormant motherhood in her is roused by its weary anguish. She is ill, she thinks, in trouble. She rises to her feet ; it is characteristic of the habits of her life, with its studied regard for the observance of small proprieties, and distrust of servants as a class, that she goes over and closes the room door carefully.

This hollow-eyed, sullen woman is so unlike the fresh girl who left her five years ago that she feels afraid. With the quiet selfishness that has characterised her life she has accepted the excuses her daughter has made to avoid coming home, as she has accepted the presents her son-in-law has sent her from time to time. She has found her a husband well-off in the world's goods, and there her responsibility ended. She approaches her hesitatingly ; she feels she ought to kiss her, there is something unusual in such a meeting after so long an absence ; it shocks her, it is so unlike the one she has pictured ; she has often looked forward to it, often ; to seeing Flo's new frocks, to hearing of her town life.

'Won't you take off your things ? You will like to go to your room ?'

She can hear how her own voice shakes ; it is really inconsiderate of Flo to treat her in this strange way.

'We will have some tea,' she adds.

Her colour is coming and going, the lace at her wrist is fluttering. The daughter observes it with a kind of dull satisfaction, she is taking out her hat-pins carefully. She notices a portrait in a

velvet case upon the mantelpiece ; she walks over and looks at it intently. It is her father, the father who was killed in India in a hill skirmish when she was a little lint-locked maid barely up to his knee. She studies it with new eyes, trying to read what man he was, what soul he had, what part of him is in her, tries to find herself by reading him. Something in his face touches her, strikes some underlying chord in her, and she grinds her teeth at a thought it rouses.

'She must be ill, she must be very ill,' says the mother, watching her, 'to think I daren't offer to kiss my own child !' She checks the tears that keep welling up, feeling that they may offend this woman who is so strangely unlike the girl who left her. The latter has turned from her scrutiny of the likeness and sweeps her with a cold criticising look as she turns towards the door, saying :

'*I should* like some tea. I will go upstairs and wash off the dust.'

Half an hour later the two women sit opposite one another in the pretty room. The younger one is leaning back in her chair watching the mother pour out the tea, following the graceful movements of the white, blue-veined hands amongst the tea things—she lets her wait on her ; they have not spoken beyond a commonplace remark about the heat, the dust, the journey.

'How is Philip, is he well ?' The mother ventures to ask with a feeling of trepidation, but it seems to her that she ought to ask about him.

'He is quite well, men of his type usually are; I may say he is particularly well just now, he has gone to Paris with a girl from the Alhambra!'

The older woman flushes painfully, and pauses with her cup half way to her lips and lets the tea run over unheeded on to her dainty silk apron.

'You are spilling your tea,' the girl adds with malicious enjoyment.

The woman gasps: 'Flo, but Flo, my dear, it is dreadful! What would your poor father have said! *no wonder* you look ill, dear, how shocking! Shall I—ask the vicar to—to remonstrate with him?—'

'My dear mother, what an extraordinary idea! These little trips have been my one solace. I assure you, I have always hailed them as lovely oases in the desert of matrimony, resting-places on the journey. My sole regret was their infrequency. That is very good tea, I suppose it is the cream.'

The older woman puts her cup on the tray and stares at her with frightened eyes and paled cheeks.

'I am afraid I don't understand you, Florence. I am old-fashioned'—with a little air of frigid propriety—'I have always looked upon matrimony as a sacred thing. It is dreadful to hear you speak this way; you should have tried to save Philip—from—from such a shocking sin.'

The girl laughs, and the woman shivers as she hears her. She cries—

'I would never have thought it of Philip. My

poor dear, I am afraid you must be very unhappy.

'Very,' with a grim smile, 'but it is over now, I have done with it. I am not going back.'

If a bomb had exploded in the quiet, pretty room the effect could hardly have been more startling than her almost cheerful statement. A big bee buzzes in and bangs against the lace of the older woman's cap and she never heeds it, then she almost screams:

'Florence, Florence, my dear, you can't mean to desert your husband! Oh, think of the disgrace, the scandal, what people will say, the'—with an uncertain quaver—'the sin. You took a solemn vow, you know, and you are going to break it—'

'My dear mother, the ceremony had no meaning for me, I simply did not know what I was signing my name to, or what I was vowing to do. I might as well have signed my name to a document drawn up in Choctaw. I have no remorse, no prick of conscience at the step I am taking; my life must be my own. They say sorrow chastens, I don't believe it; it hardens, embitters; joy is like the sun, it coaxes all that is loveliest and sweetest in human nature. No, I am not going back.'

The older woman cries, wringing her hands helplessly:

'I can't understand it. You must be very miserable to dream of taking such a serious step.'

'As I told you, I am. It is a defect of my temperament. How many women really take the man nearest to them as seriously as I did! I

think few. They finesse and flatter and wheedle and coax, but truth there is none. I couldn't do that, you see, and so I went to the wall. I don't blame them ; it must be so, as long as marriage is based on such unequal terms, as long as man demands from a wife as a right, what he must sue from a mistress as a favour ; until marriage becomes for many women a legal prostitution, a nightly degradation, a hateful yoke under which they age, mere bearers of children conceived in a sense of duty, not love. They bear them, birth them, nurse them, and begin again without choice in the matter, growing old, unlovely, with all joy of living swallowed in a senseless burden of reckless maternity, until their love, granted they started with that, the mystery, the crowning glory of their lives, is turned into a duty they submit to with distaste instead of a favour granted to a husband who must become a new lover to obtain it.'

'But men are different, Florence ; you can't refuse a husband, you might cause him to commit sin.'

'Bosh, mother, he is responsible for his own sins, we are not bound to dry-nurse his morality. Man is what we have made him, his very faults are of our making. No wife is bound to set aside the demands of her individual soul for the sake of imbecile obedience. I am going to have some more tea.'

The mother can only whimper :

'It is dreadful ! I thought he made you such an excellent husband, his position too is so good, and he is so highly connected.'

'Yes, and it is as well to put the blame in the right quarter. Philip is as God made him, he is an animal with strong passions, and he avails himself of the latitude permitted him by the laws of society. Whatever of blame, whatever of sin, whatever of misery is in the whole matter rests *solely* and *entirely* with you, mother'—the woman sits bolt upright—'and with no one else—that is why I came here—to tell you that—I have promised myself over and over again that I would tell you. It is with you, and you alone the fault lies.'

There is so much of cold dislike in her voice that the other woman recoils and whimpers piteously :

'You must be ill, Florence, to say such wicked things. What have I done? I am sure I devoted myself to you from the time you were little; I refused—dabbing her eyes with her cambric handkerchief—ever so many good offers. There was young Fortescue in the artillery, such a good-looking man, and such an elegant horseman, he was quite infatuated about me; and Jones, to be sure he was in business, but he was most attentive. Every one said I was a devoted mother; I can't think what you mean, I——'

A smile of cynical amusement checks her.

'Perhaps not. Sit down, and I'll tell you.'

She shakes off the trembling hand, for the mother has risen and is standing next to her, and pushes her into a chair, and paces up and down the room. She is painfully thin, and drags her limbs as she walks.

'I say it is your fault, because you reared me a fool, an idiot, ignorant of everything I ought to have known, everything that concerned me and the life I was bound to lead as a wife; my physical needs, my coming passion, the very meaning of my sex, my wifehood and motherhood to follow. You gave me not one weapon in my hand to defend myself against the possible attacks of man at his worst. You sent me out to fight the biggest battle of a woman's life, the one in which she ought to know every turn of the game, with a white gauze'—she laughs derisively—'of maiden purity as a shield.'

Her eyes blaze, and the woman in the chair watches her as one sees a frog watch a snake when it is put into its case.

'I was fourteen when I gave up the gooseberry-bush theory as the origin of humanity; and I cried myself ill with shame when I learnt what maternity meant, instead of waking with a sense of delicious wonder at the great mystery of it. You gave me to a man, nay more, you told me to obey him, to believe that whatever he said would be right, would be my duty; knowing that the meaning of marriage was a sealed book to me, that I had no real idea of what union with a man meant. You delivered me body and soul into his hands without preparing me in any way for the ordeal I was to go through. You sold me for a home, for clothes, for food; you played upon my ignorance, I won't say innocence, that is different. You told me, you and your sister,

and your friend the vicar's wife, that it would be an anxiety off your mind if I were comfortably settled—'

'It is wicked of you to say such dreadful things!' the mother cries, 'and besides'—with a touch of asperity—'you married him willingly, you seemed to like his attentions—'

'How like a woman! What a thorough woman you are, mother! The good old-fashioned kitten with a claw in her paw! Yes, I married him willingly; I was not eighteen, I had known no men; was pleased that you were pleased—and, as you say, I liked his attentions. He had tact enough not to frighten me, and I had not the faintest conception of what marriage with him meant. I had an idea'—with a laugh—'that the words of the minister settled the matter. Do you think that if I had realised how fearfully close the intimacy with him would have been that my whole soul would not have stood up in revolt, the whole woman in me cried out against such a degradation of myself?' Her words tremble with passion, and the woman who bore her feels as if she is being lashed by a whip. 'Would I not have shuddered at the thought of *him* in such a relationship?—and waited, waited until I found the man who would satisfy me, body and soul—to whom I would have gone without any false shame, of whom I would think with gladness as the father of a little child to come, for whom the white fire of love or passion, call it what you will, in my heart would have burned clearly and saved me

from the feeling of loathing horror that has made my married life a nightmare to me—ay, made me a murderer in heart over and over again. This is not exaggeration. It has killed the sweetness in me, the pure thoughts of womanhood—has made me hate myself and *hate you*. Cry, mother, if you will ; you don't know how much you have to cry for—I have cried myself barren of tears. Cry over the girl you killed'—with a gust of passion—‘why didn't you strangle me as a baby ? It would have been kinder ; my life has been a hell, mother—I felt it vaguely as I stood on the platform waiting, I remember the mad impulse I had to jump down under the engine as it came in, to escape from the dread that was chilling my soul. What have these years been ? One long crucifixion, one long submittal to the desires of a man I bound myself to in ignorance of what it meant ; every caress'—with a cry—‘has only been the first note of that. Look at me’—stretching out her arms—‘look at this wreck of my physical self ; I wouldn't dare to show you the heart or the soul underneath. He has stood on his rights ; but do you think, if I had known, that I would have given such insane obedience, from a mistaken sense of duty, as would lead to this ? I have my rights too, and my duty to myself ; if I had only recognised them in time.’

‘Sob away, mother ; I don't even feel for you—I have been burnt too badly to feel sorry for what will only be a tiny scar to you ; I have all the long future to face with all the world

against me. Nothing will induce me to go back. Better anything than that ; food and clothes are poor equivalents for what I have had to suffer—I can get them at a cheaper rate. When he comes to look for me, give him that letter. He will tell you he has only been an uxorious husband, and that you reared me a fool. You can tell him too, if you like, that I loathe him, shiver at the touch of his lips, his breath, his hands ; that my whole body revolts at his touch ; that when he has turned and gone to sleep, I have watched him with such growing hatred that at times the temptation to kill him has been so strong that I have crept out of bed and walked the cold passage in my bare feet until I was too benumbed to feel anything ; that I have counted the hours to his going away, and cried out with delight at the sight of the retreating carriage !'

'You are very hard, Flo ; the Lord soften your heart ! Perhaps—with trepidation—'if you had had a child—'

'Of his—that indeed would have been the last straw—no, mother.'

There is such a peculiar expression of satisfaction over something—of some inner understanding, as a man has when he dwells on the successful accomplishment of a secret purpose—that the mother sobs quietly, wringing her hands.

'I did not know, Flo, I acted for the best ; you are very hard on me !'

Later, when the bats are flitting across the moon,

and the girl is asleep—she has thrown herself half-dressed on the narrow white bed of her girlhood, with her arms folded across her breast and her hands clenched—the mother steals into the room. She has been turning over the contents of an old desk ; her marriage certificate, faded letters on foreign paper, and a bit of Flo's hair cut off each birthday, and a sprig of orange-blossom she wore in her hair. She looks faded and grey in the silver light, and she stands and gazes at the haggard face in its weary sleep. The placid current of her life is disturbed, her heart is roused, something of her child's soul-agony has touched the sleeping depths of her nature. She feels as if scales have dropped from her eyes, as if the instincts and conventions of her life are toppling over, as if all the needs of protesting women of whom she has read with a vague displeasure have come home to her. She covers the girl tenderly, kisses her hair, and slips a little roll of notes into the dressing-bag on the table and steals out, with the tears running down her cheeks.

When the girl looks into her room as she steals by, when the morning light is slanting in, she sees her kneeling, her head, with its straggling grey hair, bowed in tired sleep. It touches her. Life is too short, she thinks, to make any one's hours bitter ; she goes down and writes a few kind words in pencil and leaves them near her hand, and goes quickly out into the road.

The morning is grey and misty, with faint yellow stains in the east, and the west wind blows with a

melancholy sough in it—the first whisper of the fall, the fall that turns the world of nature into a patient suffering from phthisis—delicate season of decadence, when the loveliest scenes have a note of decay in their beauty ; when a poisoned arrow pierces the marrow of insect and plant, and the leaves have a hectic flush and fall, fall and shrivel and curl in the night's cool ; and the chrysanthemums, the ‘good-bye summers’ of the Irish peasants, have a sickly tinge in their white. It affects her, and she finds herself saying : ‘ Wither and die, wither and die, make compost for the loves of the spring, as the old drop out and make place for the new, who forget them, to be in their turn forgotten.’ She hurries on, feeling that her autumn has come to her in her spring, and a little later she stands once more on the platform where she stood in the flush of her girlhood, and takes the train in the opposite direction.

THE REGENERATION OF TWO

'Love is the supreme factor in the evolution of the world.'

—PROF. DRUMMOND.

IT is mid-June one hot forenoon in Christiania. The air seems to vibrate audibly with heat, to gasp for coolness. The sun rays play 'hide and seek' amongst the tombstones in our Saviour's graveyard. Sable-clad figures move about with spades. A few sit and do fancy work, and spend a thoughtful hour at the resting-place of some near one passed through the gates of Sleep. The roses, such roses, hang their heads with faintness as the sun becomes more insistent in his wooing, and the fragrance of a thousand plants fills the air with the glory of summer.

The long French windows of a villa overlooking it are thrown wide open. The lace curtains hang limply, for there is not a breath of wind. It is a pretty room, with evidences of taste and wealth. Its only occupant is stretched in a weary attitude in a low rocking-chair. She is swaying slowly to and fro ; a book lies on the carpet near her, as if thrown there ; her slippers are kicked aside ; she has taken off her rings, and they are glittering on her lap, and as she rocks from shade to light, and light to shade, the sun strikes gold and ruby,

emerald and diamond and sapphire flashes. She yawns wearily and stretches up her arms behind her head, then clasps her long hands—they are well formed, with a yellow whiteness and a look of delicate strength about them—round her knees, and looks at her own reflection in a mirror opposite. She is not unlike an illustration in a dainty magazine ; she has an æsthetic appreciation of the effect of her black silken-clad ankles and the froth of white lace flounces on her petticoats, the cool tones of the broad lilac and white stripes of her muslin morning gown, and the chic of the black rosette at the waist.

She is scarcely beautiful, but she is undeniably striking. There is a tantalising irregularity about the face, with its bored expression. Her mouth is large, but no man would wish it smaller, with its firm, tender curves and deep-set corners ; her brows are delicately marked ; the orbs of her wonderful eyes, with their changeful lights, are large ; there are weary lines about them, the lids are heavy with bistre stains ; her skin has an anaemic tinge, and to-day it looks shrivelled like a waxen flower with the first touch of wilting over it ; the little touch of rouge, though it is artistically applied, only heightens this effect. As she leans back, her throat looks singularly strong for such a small head ; her hair is curled loosely about her forehead ; the moulding of her temples is fine ; taking her altogether, she is seductively attractive, a thing of piquant contrasts—the attractive artificiality, physical lassitude, and irritable weariness

of a disillusioned woman of the world, and the eyes of a spoilt child filled with frank petulant query. She yawns wearily as she rocks, and looks at the coquettish bows on her pretty shoes—she fancies they have a dejected look. A door opens ; she calls irritably, ‘Jomfru !’ and a stout woman with quiet eyes and repressed mouth enters the room.

‘Does Fruen want anything ?’ She speaks respectfully, yet there is the note in her voice that one uses to a child or an invalid ; indeed, she is on terms of companionship with her mistress.

‘I’m awfully thirsty, I want something tart.’

‘Fruen had better have saft’ (fruit juice) ‘and seltzer.’

She leaves the room to return with a tray and a long glass ; the seltzer rises in little silver pearls through the rose-coloured liquid ; she watches them idly for a moment, then drinks it greedily with a sigh of satisfaction.

‘Shall I rub Fruen’s feet ?’ the woman asks, drawing forward a footstool. Without waiting for a reply she takes them on her lap and rubs gently, shaking her fingers after each time as if she is scattering away something she has drawn out of them.

‘Can’t Fruen read ?’

‘No, my head aches ; I feel much more as if I want to scream. Don’t you ever ?’

‘Fruen isn’t well.’ Then with a sort of hesitation : ‘At times—at night I do feel as if I could just cry without knowing why. I suspect all

women do—it's part of our nature. Fruen ought to do something. Fru Hohlsen, with whom I lived before, used to sew for poor children for the missionary fund, and I know English ladies have many interests—'

' Bah ! bah ! I don't believe in that, Aagot. What on earth's the good of sewing flannel petticoats for poor little niggers in Zanzibar ? I am sure it's much nicer for them to roll their little brown bodies in the warm sand, I wouldn't mind doing it myself. It's'—with a humorous twitch of mouth—'an æsthetic sin to send them out Christian fig-leaves in the shape of hideous—the patterns always *are* hideous—garments sewn by pious fingers at home here. I have too much respect for the poor little beggars' individual liberty ; and then in such a climate, too ! Phew !' She undoes her gown and draws a deep breath.

' But in Fruen's country I have read of ladies doing all sorts of things.'

' Yes, so they do ; they go in for suffrage, social reformation, politics, all sorts of fatiguing things. I thought of doing something of that kind myself, of having a mission ; but it would last just as long as it was a new sensation. Besides, I didn't care much for any of the advanced women I met, they were so desperately in earnest, they took it out of me so. I am too selfish, I am afraid, Aagot ! Do you know, I think philanthropy is a masculine attribute ; you don't find woman as a rule lavish her affections on man in the abstract. Love narrows rather than broadens her, unless she is

"crossed" in it, then she sometimes dispenses it in particles. I *want something for myself!*'

'Fruen could go into society, there is life in London, theatres, balls—'

'Psha! There's more real life here, or at least you see it more plainly. It's too big, Aagot. Friendship in London costs a tremendous lot, you have to pay very dearly for your social whistle, and it's only a tin one when you get it. I used to have the feeling at an afternoon sometimes, that I was one of a company of marionettes, and that some malicious demon was pulling a string in me, making me say things utterly unlike myself—and it wasn't even amusing. The men have the best of it. If a man is bored he puts on his hat and goes out, and looks for a man or a woman to help him to get rid of himself. Why can't we do the same? I wish I knew what to do with myself?'

'Yet Fruen has much to be thankful for. She had a rich husband and—'

'Buried him,' she interrupts cynically. 'Yes, there is a measure of thankfulness in that.'

The woman says nothing in reply, but her lips twitch and her lids drop.

'Yet Fruen likes gentlemen's society, likes to be admired, has many friends!'

'Ugh! I like talking to them, Aagot, in a way, like them to admire me, there's excitement in it; but when they want to come nearer I get a kind of dislike to them, a sort of resentment. They interest me, until they want to be more than a pastime; then, if they persist, I hate them. I am

jealous of myself, one sees such a lot of animal in them when they are in love. Sometimes I get sorry for some one and ask, "Could I marry him?"—then I shudder. It's all horrid unless one has what some one calls "the white fire of love" to burn out the animalism, to consecrate it in a way. You see I know it, Aagot'—with a serious air, 'because I married without understanding anything about it; I never cared for the master. He just came when I was in one of my affectible moods, and I was too ignorant to understand why I felt like that. He was good to me, without understanding that I had anything more in me, good in a "man of the world's" way. You were there, Aagot, and it is a terrible thing to say'—sinking her voice—'but the strongest feeling I had when he was dying or dead, though I was sorry in a way, and dreaded the loneliness, was a fierce inward whisper of exultant joy that I belonged to myself again. I fancy there must be many marriages like that in which the woman feels a dull resentment against the man because her love does not go with herself. Were *you* ever in love, Aagot?'

The colour mounts slowly to the other woman's dull fair hair.

'Yes, Frue, at least I think so. There was some one once, but there is very little to tell. I went a voyage with father; he used to take us girls in turns; that time it was to Spain. I always wanted to go to Spain.'

'You northerns always do; "Spanish" seems to convey an idea of romance, of beauty to you folk up here.'

'Perhaps, Frue. Well, we went with a cargo of deals to Barcelona ; father had a mixed freight to bring back, and we stayed there three weeks. There was a big Swedish barque at anchor next us. The captain had died in hospital and the first mate was going to take her home. I met him at a Norwegian ship chandler's ; it was a great house for all the northern skippers to meet. I met him several times. Then one evening I was going down to the quay by myself and there was a troop of asses with panniers trotting down one of the narrow streets, and there was a fearful row going on between some sailors and a woman, and when I saw knives flash I got frightened and ran down an alley. A fellow leaning against a doorway said something to me in Spanish and caught hold of me, and I screamed ; and *he* came up and sent him flying into the gutter, and took my arm and led me away. I felt faint and couldn't answer him, and it wasn't because I was frightened, but because there was something that came from him to me and paralysed me and made my legs fail me. I often met him after that, and he was always just the same, laughing, joking, mischievous, never serious, and sometimes that hurt me ; and one day I saw him leaning against a counter talking to a Spanish woman with just the same look as when he spoke to me, and I went on board and didn't go on shore for three days. Father thought it was the heat was too much for me ; and one evening when he had gone in to a dinner with a Danish captain, *he* rowed over and came on board and

talked to me. He wasn't feeling well, he said he had missed me, asked me where I lived in Norway, if I was engaged. We sat and listened to the castanets ringing out from a dance house near the wharf, and I was very happy. He said when he was going, that he would likely be skipper after the next voyage and that he wanted to settle down, and that he would come and see mother after he got home. Two days after, he was dead—a sort of cholericine, they said. That is why I go out to service. The winter after that I stayed at home and it nearly drove me mad. I like to work; when I am idle I can hear the castanets and the air of the dance they played—work is the best.'

'But you are going to marry a cousin, aren't you?'

'Yes, Fruen, that is to say a cousin's widower. He is a cripple, he got a stroke, and he has three little children. I love the children, I went to school with her—and you see—he is quite helpless.'

'Hum! will that satisfy you?'

'I think so, Fruen; I don't want a husband—I should hate it. The one I wanted lies out there under the olive-trees in the Catholic churchyard. I just want the children; little Henrik has a smile like his.' There is a long silence; a bee buzzes in and fills the room with the drone of summer.

'Perhaps you are right,' says her mistress, 'you have the melody of the air he played in you. No man ever played on me. I am like a harp that has lain away until the strings are frayed, and no one ever called out its deepest music.'

'Fruen ought to go out,' she replies ; and she slips on her shoes, and rises with no touch of sentiment in her stolid face, and busies herself in the next room.

The woman in the chair gets slowly up, and goes into her bed-room—there is a delicate smell of violets about it. She takes off her loose gown and begins to dress. She is far above the average height, and as she lifts her rather long, bare arms to reach down a gown, every action is full of grace. She has sloping shoulders and a long, deep chest ; she looks slight of hips, and yet her frailness is more apparent than real ; her muscles show under her delicate skin as she moves. She dresses slowly, and stamps her foot impatiently when she lets anything drop out of her hand, which she seems to do often in her nervous irritability. She looks at herself in the long glass with a kind of satisfaction, rubs off a final dab of powder with a soft piece of chamois, lifts up her gown and looks at her feet in the glass, turns slowly round to get a back view, and then gives a pleased nod over her shoulder at her own image.

Quarter of an hour later she is on her way to the landing-stage, for she has decided to go to Bygdo, that prettiest of Christiania surroundings.

The city is almost given over to tourists. A party of Cockney 'Cookies' are standing outside Torstrup the jeweller's window. She smiles as she passes them, for they have evidently anticipated a polar temperature. 'What guys !' she laughs, hurrying on, for they are making un-

flattering remarks, at the top of their voices, on some of the idiosyncrasies of national costume, with a characteristic disregard of the fact that every second Norwegian understands them. She turns with relief to look at a group of pretty girls and students, town residents probably. Their fresh laughter touches her in some way. She is affected to-day by every change in the world about her.

She finds a comfortable seat on the little steamer, and settles down to languid enjoyment of the scene. It is too early for a crowd, and she is aware of a strange feeling, of a presentiment of coming change as they steam out. The fanciful idea strikes her that all the flags fluttering from the different poles are flying gaily in honour of some special event in her life. The very breeze blowing freshly from the sea seems to whisper of a vague change. The mountains lie blue in the distance, and she watches idly the water drip off the oars of the rowing boats they pass—looks as if they scattered a shoal of little silvern fish at each dip, she thinks. Students' and girls' and children's laughter, and the murmur of voices about her, reach her without conveying any sense to her; she feels inclined to close her eyes and just sleep.

When they reach Bygdo she hurries past the tables, the waiters with seidels of beer, and what an Irish acquaintance wittily calls ‘bread and butter and trimmins,’ bends round the cove and up to the wood. The witchery of the surround-

ings begins to affect her. The resinous smell of the pines does her head good. The fir-trees stand sturdily, as if listening to the gracile silver birches bending their delicate branches in airy persiflage. A wren alights for an instant on a blossom of dwarf honeysuckle, then darts under a tuft of wild thyme. The lace of her parasol throws patterns on the grass, and the quick trab of horses coming round the bend of the road startles her, and she slips quickly aside. An officer, a civilian, and two ladies ride by. She recognises one of them, the young wife of a painter ; scandal connects her name with the man at her side. How whitely her teeth gleamed through the crimson curve of her lips as she laughed, thinks the woman, and a story she heard lately about her flashed through her memory. Some way the meeting jarred on her ; she wants to get away by herself, away from the memory of town scandals and town people. She almost regrets she did not take a droschke out to the country. She turns down a side-path towards the water. She sits down under a tree on the slope. The cove forms a horseshoe to the right ; in the centre lie the landing-stage and bathing-house. She can see heads bobbing in the water from where she is seated. To the left the fjord stretches, dotted with islands and boats, and further still she can see a villa, and a flag fluttering from a white staff against a background of pines. Groups of people are scattered about. Two Hallelujah lasses in neat uniform pass her with Norsk versions of the

War Cry under their arms ; a soldier, with a hat like a forester's, with the addition of a horse's tail, is chaffing them. A little below her, two lovers are sitting oblivious of passers-by ; his arm is around her waist, and her head is on his shoulder. The expression on his otherwise stupid face disgusts her, and she hurries further round the cove and seats herself again. She is tired, flushed with the exertion, and she sits watching lazily the dip of the sails, and the midges as they whirl before her against the background of blue sky, in ever-recurring giddy circles, always two, an aerial wooing.

There is no one to be seen, yet she is not at ease : she experiences the odd feeling one has sometimes of not being alone, and her heart throbs with quick thuds that seem to dominate over the little, whispering, flute-like prattle of the water against the rock. She looks round as if expecting to see eyes peering down through the firs at her back. The conviction grows upon her of the nearness of some one. She has felt eyes on her back before, has felt strange presences with some sense that lies outside her ordinary senses. She gets up and walks down towards a blue-grey boulder with a clump of dried bracken next it, to look behind it, and as she reaches it she is stopped by a yawning whine that ends in an unmistakable growl. A dog, *genus* cur, a rough, yellow-coated dog, crouched on the grass a yard ahead, is looking up at her ; she has honest, tawny eyes, and a ragged ear torn in some old fight, and she is studying her

attentively. She looks back at her bravely enough, although she draws a quick breath, and the lace on her bodice flutters as her breast heaves. Something else, too, is working in her : a hypnotised sensation, making her limbs heavy ; it isn't fear, it is purely physical. She snaps her fingers, and pats her knee coaxingly, and is answered by a yawn that reassures her. She walks on ; this time the growl is only feigned, and she becomes aware of a man lying on the bracken in the hollow below the boulder. She stops at once, and the blood rushes to her face in a hot flood. She looks down at him, and a kind of wondering, interested look succeeds her surprise. The man at her feet is not a tramp, and there is something in the unconscious helplessness of his attitude that appeals to all that is womanly in her ; perhaps it is just the unconsciousness. It reminds her too, with the thrown-up arm and hand loosely clenched, of a little brother, dead so many years that he is barely a memory ; besides, the fellow's head is striking, and he sleeps with his mouth shut. It isn't given to every man to look beautiful in his sleep, even though he may pass for a handsome chap enough in his waking hours ; faces tell tales in sleep, one's subliminal consciousness is apt to play mean tricks with one's expression. This man's face has a sorrow-worn, spiritualised look, a sternness about the mouth ; he is clean-shaven, and his hair is longer than the men of his set wear it, but it is dark and soft and silky. She wonders vaguely what colour his eyes are. He

looks, she thinks, as if he has gone through some of God's mills and got hurt in the grinding. She is conscious of a wonderful sudden change in herself ; her depression is melting away, she only feels a ridiculous kind of buoyant reaction against it, a sense of rest after disturbance, the quiet after a rain gust. She hardly knows why she remains standing there, looking down at the sleeping man ; she tells herself the proper thing to do is to go. She is about to do so, not, she recognises with some astonishment, without reluctance, when the dog, perhaps awakened to a sense of having failed somewhat in her duty, protests by catching her dress in her teeth, letting it go, growling and frisking round her. Now, fear is not exactly a part of her nature, but regard for a pretty gown is. She stands still, and whispers soothingly to the beast. It has a certain effect. She lets go, but seizes her again every time she takes a step forward. The ludicrous aspect of the matter strikes her, and she laughs softly. She stands still, doggie likewise a little distance away. Finally, the latter lies down with her forepaws stretched out, keeping her quizzical eyes fixed on the woman. This grows monotonous ; she says to herself, 'I wonder if I may venture to sit down.' She bends slowly, keeping her eyes on the dog ; the latter growls softly. She sinks on one knee ; it is not an easy manœuvre, encumbered as she is with a parasol and a book ; however, she accomplishes it successfully, with one foot under her. Doggie is satisfied with the compromise, so she

gets into a better position. She has a side-view of the sleeping man, and she examines him with a woman's attention to details. His clothes are rough blue serge, the unstarched collar of his linen shirt is scrupulously clean, a soft felt hat is lying on the grass near him, and a canvas knapsack ; his shoes are worn, one of them is patched. She speculates on his calling—a painter, a poet, a Bohemian of some sort—likely. A 'pillar of the State,' a churchwarden—unlikely. Meanwhile the sun creeps round, and slants through a tree right on to his face. How tired he looks ! there is a weary droop about his mouth. She flushes, hesitates, looks at the dog—she is asleep, with her black snout on her paws ; she moves very softly, and contrives, by leaning back, to stand her open sunshade so that it shades his face. Its lace and knots of ribbon flutter and throw fantastic shadows over him, and she laughs, for it reminds her of a furbelowed bassinette. The little dog creeps up to her, gives her wrist a lick, trots down to the water's edge and laps eagerly, comes back and nestles down at her knee. She takes off her glove, and scratches her behind her ears and rubs her head. ' You are a bit of a vagabond, I think,' she whispers. There are many old scars, and one ear is split, and, when she cocks it, the half of it flaps in a comical way. So she sits with an unwonted sense of drowsy well-being ; the mingled smell of pine-trees and brackish water, the lap and sparkle of the waves that wash gently in the sunshine, the rustle of foliage and the trickle of

runlets finding their way to the fjord, act soothingly. She is affectible to-day, stirred in the depths of her nature, in the underlying wholesome woman that is there, uncalled to life, for the warp is only external.

How long she sits there she heeds not; a little breeze rises and a shrill whistle sounds in the distance. She looks at her watch, almost five o'clock. Chiff, chiff, chuff, chuff, and the steamer by which she has intended to return passes by with its freight of gladsome people towards the landing stage. She is loth to go, it is so good to sit thus bathed in silken air; besides, she feels as if she is infused with some mystical elixir that is filtering down to the underlying strata of her being. Let chance decide! She unloosens a penknife from her chatelaine, and spins it smartly on a flat stone in the moss beside her: 'points to me, I go!' She catches her breath, and sets her teeth in her lip, as the silver and pearl glisten as it revolves slower, slower, a-ah, she closes her lids involuntarily—opens them—one little turn more; the point rests fjordwards. She feels inclined to clap her hands; she recalls having experienced precisely the same relief once years ago, when, in a fit of childish passion, she had thrown a stone at a playmate and it just missed her temple. Why should she feel so, now? she asks herself; well, why analyse? She has two hours more until the next steamer! She feels unreasonably glad, as glad as when, a little child, she sat in the meadows and wove daisy chains, twenty golden

years ago. The steamer has left again, and up in the sky above its track two clouds are meeting ; now they fuse and turn into a chariot tipped with silver, and soar upwards. ‘Why can’t,’ she says softly, ‘his soul, and my soul, and the doggie’s soul loosen ourselves and float away in soul communion out of the barren loneliness of this old earth here?’ The band up in the ‘umbrella’ strikes up the opening bars of a ‘Huldretanz,’ a weird, witching thing with a want in it, and somehow it brings her back to earth again. She laughs at herself, and pats the dog’s head and says : ‘No, I wouldn’t sail over the clouds if I could, I’d rather be you, doggie, and curl up under the caress of some one’s hand.

She considers herself as she sits there. Her patent shoes are made by the best man in London ; her muslin gown, with all its apparent simplicity, is fitted by Parisian fingers ; and her hat is an inspiration of blossoms and lace from the Rue de la Paix. Her gloves are delicate to sight and smell and touch ; and yet she would give all she possesses for one hour’s real happiness.

Suddenly the quiet is broken, a troop of boys and girls playing ‘hide and seek’ come rushing round the slope, and one of them holds a handful of pine cones. She throws them with uncertain aim at the lad following her, and darts up through the trees with a giggling scream ; the tan cones pelt her with a rattle on to the sunshade and over the sleeper. He wakes, not drowsily, but all at

once wide-awake, with eyes black on awakening, grey as the pupils close with the light, steel-grey, as a lake without sunlight.

He sits up, looks at the cones, at the sunshade, at the woman. She is uncomfortably conscious of his steady, cool scrutiny. It flashes through her that he is not in the least impressed, and that he will judge on first impressions. She flushes angrily, and stammers :

'Some young people playing threw those things, and they fell on my parasol.'

The man's face softens ; he says directly and simply :

'Did you put it here to shade me ?'

'Yes, the sun was fearfully strong, and it struck directly on your head.'

'Thank you, it was very kind of you. I must have slept a long time.'

He takes out a clumsy, old-fashioned silver watch in a crystal case such as peasants wear.

'You were asleep when I came three hours ago,' she interjects.

He examines her with new interest, frowns as he takes her in, as if puzzled at himself, or some sudden idea.

'That is odd, for I never can sleep if any one is near me, never.'

She feels, for her senses are sharpened in some subtle way, that there is disapproval of her in the look. It is a new sensation, she wonders why she finds it more hurtful than amusing.

'Your dog objected to my going in the first

instance,' she says, with a touch of restraint. A pained disturbance is replacing the unreasoning sense of joy that has possessed her, her head throbs, and a feeling of faintness overpowers her. The sun-filled air, the music, water, all the thrumming sounds of summer seem to fuse into a gigantic gold-green disc, that revolves first quickly, then with ever-slackening turns, around her, until she loses herself in the slow swirl. A voice coming to her from ever so far away rouses her, saying, 'Drink this!' The cold of metal touches her lips, and the disc whirls the other way round with sickening swirls, ever quicker and quicker, until it stops with a jerk, and she comes to full consciousness of herself and her surroundings. He is holding the top of a flask to her lips, watching her with eyes in which the dominant expression is impatient disapproval. It strikes her as supremely funny, she can't help herself, and she bursts into an hysterical, uncontrollable fit of laughter. It has a true unaffected ring in it, and it is unrestrained as a child's; coming from her, it is as if one of the figures in a fashion plate in a lady's paper were suddenly to change its simper into a natural smile, and let its waist expand. The man's face relaxes, and he stands up remarking :

' You are better, Frue; it was the heat, no doubt and you gave me your parasol.' A pause. ' Why did you ? '

She blushes through her powder, and tells the simple truth.

'I don't know. You looked someway helpless, like a child, in your sleep.'

She pales again; he draws his brows together impatiently, and says somewhat ungraciously:

'Can I get you anything?'

'Yes, if you don't mind calling to a waiter, please; or, perhaps, I shall be all right in a moment, I will go myself.'

He has put on his hat, and picked up the sunshade; the impatient look leaves his face again as he hands it to her.

'What does Fruen want—coffee, lager? I am at her commands.'

'Coffee, please, and I am very hungry'—meekly.

He has gone, followed by the dog, trotting first to the right, then to the left, at his heels.

She bursts into another fit of laughter, and diving her hand into her pocket, takes out a little ivory case with a glass in it, and looks at herself. It strikes her as never before, that the powder accentuates her lines and makes her look horribly haggard. She wipes it off carefully. The utterly non-admirative look in the man's eyes is burning into her, as the recollection of some *bêtise* one has committed will strike one afterwards with a double sense of discomfiture. If she were not afraid of his coming back, she would go down to the fjord and wash her face. It has grown natural to her to exact homage from every man, and it piques her, rouses a devil-may-care mood in her.

A waiter comes down the slope with a tray, a

coffee-service, and some sandwiches. A shade crosses her face as she sees that he is alone ; but she reassures herself, as she sees his knapsack and stick still lying there.

Whilst she is picking out the little nickel coins in her purse, she inquires with an effort at carelessness for the gentleman who ordered it. The waiter has in the meantime been examining her clothes, and he is puzzled. He says doubtfully, ‘ I brought for two, Fruen ; the gentleman only said, “ take some coffee and something to eat down to where that lady is sitting,” pointing Fruen out.’

‘ Oh, that is all right, keep the change.’

The man goes away smiling. She buries the coffee-pot in a clump of bracken and waits. The band is playing a waltz, the whole atmosphere is filled with a murmur of leafage and laughter, whispers of wind and wave. It seems to her a long time since he went ; she is thirsty and starts at every step and looks around. At length his voice sounds behind her :

‘ I hope Fruen got all she wanted ? ’ He asks it politely ; the doggie trots and looks wistfully at the tray. ‘ Fruen hasn’t had anything yet ! She has been waiting——?’

She disinters the thick white coffee-pot from its nest in the bracken. The sun flicks rainbow sparks off the rings on her ivory-tinted hands as she sets the cups to rights. ‘ You were a long time ! ’

She does not look up to see in what way he takes her remark, she is half afraid of the new side of herself that is prompting her to recklessness.

She hands him his cup with a demure tightening of lips, and then passes the sugar basin.

'Well, when ladies will!' he says, and there is a mocking note in his voice. Her lips quiver and there is a mute reproach in her look; it touches him as her laughter before, and he changes his tone and says 'thank you' simply.

It crosses her mind that some of her acquaintances, a certain little lawyer with very keen eyes, might easily pass, and put her in an awkward position. She pours some cream into a saucer for the dog.

'Does Fruen often have these extempore picnics?' with the intonation that hurts her.

She looks him steadily in the face.

'This is the first time, and you are the first man I have ever spoken to without a formal introduction and'—with a quiver through her voice—"I don't know why I am doing it now. It's not that you are too—too amiable.'

There is a silence that seems long, and the man pushes back his hat with an impetuous, nervous movement and runs his hand through his hair and says :

'But, dear lady, don't think so; I scarcely understand, I mistook—I—I am sorry. You see I am not used to women, to ladies—to any one lately. I am not much used to kindness, I resent it rather; I am a solitary kind of fellow, a bear, a boor, anything you like; you must overlook it.'

'Have some strawberries?' is her only reply, and she heaps a plate with the tiny wild berries

and smothers them with cream, adding mischievously : ‘ They are rather uncultivated too, but they are nice for all that, far better than the garden ones.’

He laughs responsively, his eyes glow warmly when he laughs, as if they catch and keep the sunlight. She heaps the things carefully on the tray, stands up and waits in an undecided way, swinging her sunshade :

‘ Don’t you hate seeing the remains of a meal ? ’ she asks.

He laughs. ‘ I am afraid I am sometimes so glad to see the meal that those hyper-refinements are lost upon me.’

She walks round the slope skirting the water’s edge ; he follows, shouldering his knapsack ; they go further into the wood, where the last year’s fir needles carpet the ground with a warm brown ; and she finds a place where the evening sun is sending golden slants to the water’s edge. She throws down her shawl and sits down ; looks up at him, and he cedes to whatever of mute invitation may have been in her brief glance.

He stretches out his hand to feel in the pocket of his knapsack, hesitates and draws it back. She divines his intention and says : ‘ I don’t mind, at least in the open air.’ He lights his pipe and she sees a package of closely written papers in the pocket. She would like to ask him where he is going, but fears he might resent it ; she never remembers before to have taken the man’s feelings into consideration ; she has simply dwelt on her own as of primary importance.

'Does Fruen live in Christiania?'

She feels he asks it more for the sake of saying something than from any real interest in her.

'At present. I have an estate on the south coast, I came up for a change.'

'Does Fruen like the city?'

'I don't like any place much: they are all the same. And you?' with timidity.

'I, Fruen? I'—with a grim humour—'I am the most fruitless of all things; the thing of least commercial value to the state—a poet. I belong nowhere, the whole world is mine! Poor in all the world counts of value, and yet I am rich in all she has of best—in myself—in freedom.'

She scarcely knows why, but a shadow falls on her heart at his words. This strange man who is so self-sure, who is unaffected by her presence as no man before; to whom she is almost afraid to talk; who looks dreamily ahead at some mental picture in which she has no part, seems even as a shadow unseizable—what does she know of the working of his soul, how reach him? Her temples throb, she is unconsciously concentrating every effort of her will to draw his spirit to hers.

Suddenly there is a tremulous stirring and whispering in the foliage, a ripple across the water, a susurrus in the air, the disturbances one feels just before sundown, as if some unseen spirit is soaring across the land announcing the sun's good-night.

The silent man watches Sol's masterpiece, the silent woman watches it and him. Before them a

stretch of swart green land lies low against a distant background of purple mountains, a purple almost black in its intensity. And above it a scattered mass of brazen gold clouds, flecked with vivid purple, is tossed in heaps, as if flung by some Titan's hand against the sky of aurous green—a sky that suggests a veil of filmy golden tissue dropped smoothly over a background of lettuce green. The veil is jagged at the ends and the green becomes fainter and fainter and blends into the tint of a wren's egg, changes into opal, warms again suddenly and melts into the sea in delicate misty rose. And further to the left a great bold sweep of opaque salmon and orange, and orange-pink cloud spattered with audacious violet flecks, darts upwards from the horizon to resolve into transparent nebulous filaments of colour overhead. They both give a sigh as the last wave of colour fades. An exultant feeling masters her soul, because she knows that for the space of the gorgeous colour-change they have felt together, and the knowledge brings an odd shyness with it. The dog licks her wrist in a friendly way and goes over to her master and snoozles her snout into the palm of his hand. She makes one more desperate effort, not without a sense of shamed wonder at herself, to approach him :

‘ Why do you say a poet is the most fruitless of all things ? ’

He looks puzzled for a moment, then recalling his own remark looks at her with a fresh gleam of interest.

'Because he sees too much. Because his soul is a harp hung up in the market-place of the world. Every passer-by strikes a chord on it, most of them roughly. Because he is cursed with a dual nature, flesh and spirit always warring in him ; because the very harmony of his creations springs from the discords of his temperament. Does Fruen never think ? I mean think of things outside the circle of her own immediate desires ?'

There is more than sarcasm in his voice, there is a wish to probe under the surface of her 'make-up,' as he puts it to himself : to get at the woman under that infernal corset.

'Sometimes !' she replies ; she is not surprised, neither is she offended ; he is a new type of man and she is attracted powerfully. 'I read more, I have got into a way of letting other people think for me. I used to think more when I was a girl than I do now. *A quoi bon ?* Life is a bore.'

'So ? why should it be ? isn't that your own fault ?'

'No, I don't know that it is, quite. The things I have don't satisfy me. People seldom interest me for long, and the more one thinks, the more discontented one gets.'

'But you do get discontented. That is a hopeful sign. With yourself or things ?'

'Both !' With a sudden inspiration : 'Tell me something : what do you see when you get that absent look ? You had it a while ago.'

He flushes this time. 'Only thoughts, Frue ; thoughts that find words and glide into verses,

mayhap into print, to lie on a shelf—perhaps wrap butter !'

'Oh, poetry, I hate poetry !' He turns and looks at her. 'Except folk-songs. I'd much sooner read prose. I hate bothering with metre and dodging about after the verb ; one gets at the heart of the thing—at least I do—best in plain prose. I don't believe that women as a rule do like poetry as well as men. I believe we have really much less sentiment in us. No,'—with a coaxing intonation—'tell me what you see in plain prose ; tell me the truth !'

He smiles, and she marvels at the softening of the stern lines and the new tone in his voice.

'The truth ? Does Fruen think she could stand the truth ? Truth doesn't wear a fig-leaf !'

'Fruen will try.'

There is a long silence, and then he says, half-musingly :

'Close your eyes, Fruen, and look down over all the cities of the world—look with your inner eyes, try to pierce to the soul of things ; what do you see ? Shall I tell you what *I* see ? A great crowd of human beings. Take all these men, male and female, fashion them into one colossal man, study him, and what will you find in him ? Tainted blood ; a brain with the parasites of a thousand systems sucking at its base and warping it ; a heart robbed of all healthy feelings by false conceptions, bad conscience, and a futile code of morality—a code that makes the natural workings of sex a vile thing to be ashamed of ; the healthy

delight in the cultivation of one's body as the beautiful perfect sheath of one's soul and spirit, with no shame in any part of it, all alike being clean, a sin of the flesh, a carnal conception to be opposed by asceticism. A code that has thrown man out of balance and made sexual love play far too prominent a part in life—(it ought to be one note, not even a dominant note, in the chord of human love)—a code that demands the sacrifice of thousands of female victims as the price of its maintenance, that has filled the universe with an unclean conception of things, a prurient idea of purity—making man a great sick man. Divide him into units again, drop them into their separate places, and look down at them : a hungry, ignorant crowd swarming like flies over a dust-heap in search of enough to keep them alive for the day. Look down to the market-places of the world and watch the jugglers at play ; the jugglers of religion and morality. What a motley crowd of followers each one can claim, and how they applaud with satisfaction as the gilded balls are tossed before them ! Look at the domes and spires and minarets of the houses of worship ; listen to the preachers shrieking from the pulpits, listen how their voices roll out and are lost in the chink of the money-changers' coins, and the clamour of the bourse in the great squares. See, there comes a procession headed by cardinals who spend their lives in deciding theological quibbles as futile as the famous one of " how many angels can dance on the point of a needle " ! And as it passes on

with its mitres and costly robes and swinging censers, and waxen lights in silver candelabra, and trappings worth a prince's ransom, the crowd cry "Alleluia" for the space of a second, only to return to their bartering and their "Buy, buy, buy!" and the last chant of the choir is drowned by the raucous voices of the latest novelty vendor. "I am the only true church, in me seek salvation! anathema maranatha be to him who believeth not in me!" cry the heralds of the older creeds of the state, and their words are swallowed by a crash of cymbals, rattle of tambourines, and the swell of brass instruments and voices singing in hysterical frenzy of Jordan rivers and golden streets to the latest music-hall air. *You*, deafened by the many voices, ask which is the true belief? and a feeble voice replies to you and says: "Do good for good's sake, without thought of heaven or fear of hell;" and, stepping forth, he cries that the balls are gilded; points to the cracks in the pedestals upon which the gods stand; and the exponents of the creeds look frightened, and the partisans of each rally round and cry their particular "Crucify him!" There is a volley of stones, a rush of hurrying feet, a little blood, a few grey hairs, and the voice is silenced—so much for religion. And I look to the rulers of the world, and I see an emperor hold up a withered hand, and yet in that hand the threads of the destinies of nations are held as an old wife curls the flax for her distaff; and he tangles them into a ball, and throws it down with his gauntlet to the other nations, and

says, "Fight for it!" And trumpets call, and the hand trembles under the beat of marching feet and rings with the clangour of arms ; and men leave their ploughs, and the hammer ceases to ring on the village anvils, and dust covers the sawdust beneath the carpenter's bench ; and the group at the door of the village inn is made up of red-eyed women with tear-worn cheeks, forsaken sweethearts, senile greybeards, and half-grown youths—thirsting for tidings of the men who have marched from them ; and away on the battlefields where the brethren of Christ, the Peacemaker, meet as foes, the brown earth is soaked with blood, and the vultures, with gore-dripping beaks, flap heavily from dead horse to conscious men, alike their prey ; and I see factory doors open and troops of men and women and children, apologies for human beings, narrow-chested, stunted, with the pallor of lead-poisoning in their haggard faces, troop out of them ; and as they laugh wearily their teeth shake loosely in their blue-white gums, and they are too tired to wash the poison off their hands before their scanty meals. And I see great monopolies eating away the substance of the people, and magnificent chapels built in memory of railway kings who ruined thousands of women and children, and I say, "So much for the rulers."

'And I said to myself, "Salvation lies with the women and the new race they are to mother." I sought out women I had heard of whose names were identified with advancement ; and I found them no whit less eager to employ every seduc-

tion at their command to win men over to their particular narrow cause, than their frivolous sister to keep him at her beck and call. And she who flaunted the white banner of purity calculated the cut of her evening frock, and enticed men to walk under her banner by the whiteness of her breast. And underneath it all I saw vanity, the old insatiable love of power that is the breath of most women's nostrils, or the physiological necessity for excitement that belongs to the wavering cycle of her being ; and I found no woman, to whom, if I had said : "Love is a divine gift, it is the strength of the game of life ! Come with me, work with me, be the mother of my children to come, let us try to live the broad life purely, and soberly, in like freedom for the development of the best in each of us," who would have placed her hand in mine with the courage of womanhood, sure of herself, and come. I had illusions in those days. I sought my Rachel well, I would have served my time for her patiently, but I found her not. Sometimes I thought I had found her, but it was only a mask with sawdust at the back of it ; for if I buried my face in her neck to smell the sweetness of herself—faugh ! she reeked of distilled perfumes and scented powders ; if I uncoiled her hair it came off in my hand and the roots grew dark to mock the gold of its length ; and when I spoke to her of little children she looked bored, for little children spoil one's figure and dim the lustre of one's eyes ; and when I saw how skilled they were in converting their bodies into targets for men, I said : man

need not trouble to woo woman, for she can calculate to the finest point the cut of her gown on her hips, the flutter of lace on her bust. She knows how to reach him at his worst by deliberate caculation of dress—and then sell herself or her daughter to the one who can pay the most for trappings to set her off. And I went amongst the advanced women—some on platforms, some in clubs, some buttonholing senators in the lobby of the senate, or cooing politics or social economy over afternoon tea ; and I knew that in hovels and cellars in the dens of the “angel makers” the foredoomed fruitage of human mating wailed pitifully on heaps of reeking straw, sucking their lean thumbs hungrily; and no woman of the crowd of reformers had courage enough to cut the father if she knew him to be amongst her acquaintance. And still I sought amongst the petticoated crowd, I conned the inscriptions upon the banners—suffrage, purity, equal wage ; I looked underneath and I said that with some it was a pastime, but with most “suppressed sex” was having its fling ; I turned from them and went into a lighted square, and the rippling laughter of women’s voices fell softly as the churring of ringdoves in my ears, soothing after the chattering shrieks of “wrongs” of the women I had left—and I was surrounded by women ; some just crossed girlhood, some alluring in the ripeness of womanhood, some old, painted into fictitious youth, making age despicable. The frou-frou of silken skirts, the tap of little heels on the pavement, the heaviness of

perfumes, the touch of their hands as they slipped them under my arm or searched my pockets enervated me ; dark eyes smiled at me, and blue eyes grew deeper as they met mine, and I had to wrench myself free to save myself; asking as I fled: "With how many of these is it just selection ? Surely here is the place to begin, here, where women are on sale in a public mart." And I saw men hurrying past the place I had just quitted, with tender girls on their arms, and these all had bandages over their eyes, and I asked, "Why are they blindfolded ?" for I noticed that many peeped out under the bandages when a male step passed by, and that in all a morbid curiosity gleamed. And the men made answer : "I would keep her from eating the tree of knowledge, for she is my one ewe lamb ; I would keep her from the understanding of evil until to-morrow, when I deliver her into her husband's hands—an ignorant virgin." Her betrothed hastened up, and he too shielded her from the wanton crowd on the pavement, and as one, more bold than the rest, pressed towards the girl, he shoved her brutally aside, so that she fell and cut herself sorely ; and the women with the banners marching by that way passed her with cold indifference, for they too must be protected and kept clean at all cost ; and I marvelled anew, thinking "Verily, the price is great !" But the Jezebel whom he had struck staggered on to her feet again, and, stepping near to him, whispered with a triumphant smile on her cracked lips : " *You* can open the book of life for her ! fitting exponent of

the text of evil ! for have I not taught you ? Have not I given you a bridal gift for her ; and her children and her children's children, a fatal crimson flower with far-reaching tendrils ?—the *flower of revenge* of me and my sisters. I know you well. You have forgotten me, for I was but one of the many embraced in a night of passion and forgotten with the dawn of the day. Go to your unsoiled dove ; were her eyes not blindfolded, she would be loth to take you." So much for women !

'I was but a youth, but my heart burned in me at the problems that presented themselves to me, and I returned home to my native place, and I wrote down these things, and I unveiled the hushed truths that carry betterment, and they deprived me of my office in the state ; and woman, being a creature appreciative of the concrete, shunned me. For I had thrown aside a chance of endowing her with a social position ; and men called me "a crack-brained poet," a madman, and now I have learnt to lean on myself——'

She draws a long breath that is half a crying sigh.

The band is playing a wild Hungarian dance, and the beat of whirling feet comes down to them, and the laughter of men and women's voices, and away at a great distance a bell is tolling, and a dog barking with a sharp, excited yap, yap ; but it seems to her that she is inside a circle, and that his voice alone reaches her. She feels her corset press her like an iron hand ; she is shamed to the depths of her soul. The spots of rouge on her

cheeks seem to sting as a sharp blow from a freshly gathered nettle ; and she is conscious that she who has all her life let men care for her, and closed her eyes without thought of their trouble or what she may have done to them ; that she, who would have laughed at their presuming to find fault with her, only cares now because this one 'crack-brained poet,' outcast, what you will, is the first man who has touched the underlying fibres of her nature ; and she is the epitome of this class of women he lashes with his scorn ! She cringes inwardly, and a dull pain stirs in her, and she queries impatiently, as so many others have done before her : What is this feeling, and from where does it come, making us the playthings of the inexplicable ?

'Are you not ever lonely ?' she asks.

'Yes, when I am ill. The only natural companion for man is woman. I seek now in nature what I failed to find in her. I lay my heart on the brown lap of earth, and close my eyes in delicious restfulness. I can feel her respond to me ; she gives me peace without taxing me for a return. I sought that in woman, for I thought to find her nature's best product, of all things closest in touch with our common mother. I hoped to find rest on her great mother heart ; to return home to her for strength and wise counsel ; for it is the primitive, the generic, that makes her sacred, mystic, to the best men. I found her half-man or half-doll. No, it is women, not men, who are the greatest bar to progress the world holds.'

Her thoughts have been clamouring for words as he speaks, and as his voice dies away she asks, half defiantly, half timidly :

'Perhaps more of us than you think recognise the truth of what you say. In our girlhood we perhaps ask, but such questions are not easily answered ; one seeks to spare youth from disillusion. And don't you think'—there is a shake in her voice, and the man watches her, shading his eyes with his hands—'that you are rather hard on—us dolls ? Perhaps we too have our lonely hours, hours in which we ask ourselves what it is we need to complete us ? Perhaps we seek a key to the enigma of our own natures, we try man after man to see if he hold it. Do you think, taking them on an average, that they could give it to us ? You are hard on us'—with a touch of sadness—'for perhaps we are merely the playthings of circumstances ; contradictions, leading a dual life, . . . our varying moods bound up with the physiological gamut of our being. We have been taught to shrink from the honest expression of our wants and feelings as violations of modesty, or at least good taste. We are always battling with some bottom layer of real womanhood that we may not reveal ; the primary impulses of our original destiny keep shooting out mimosa-like threads of natural feeling through the outside husk of our artificial selves, producing complex creatures.' Her voice vibrates with feeling, and she marvels at her own words, and where she finds expression for her thoughts. 'One layer in

us reverts instinctively to the time when we were just the child-bearing half of humanity and no more, waging war with the new layers that go to make up the fragile latter-day product with the disinclination to burden itself with motherhood. And our powder and our paints! Aren't they rather tributes to the decay of chivalry in your own sex? It's not to woman but to pretty woman man pays deference. So much'—with bitterness—'for the dolls, as you call them, . . . and the desexualised half man, with a pride in the absence of sex feeling, reckoning it as the sublimest virtue to have none, what is she but the outcome of centuries of patient repression? Repress and repress—how many generations has it gone on? You must expect some return for it—if you get the man-woman as a result! Well, I have known some feminine men too. Isn't feminisation a result of all civilisation, and isn't'—with desperation—'it that perhaps you resent most?'

She has risen to her feet, and is leaning against a slender fir-tree; she is quivering with excitement. The man still watches her under his hand.

'I have been a coward because I have half felt these things, but I never knew till to-day that I could put my thoughts into words, and may be after to-day I shall turn over a new leaf, and put more into my life, or more of myself into it.'

Her voice is steady now, and her eyes are shining. The man has risen to his feet, and the steamboat passes towards the landing-stage.

They seem to have changed places, for he is watching her, and she only thinks of herself. She feels as if her inmost soul is laid bare, as if she cannot face the people, possible acquaintances on the boat, in her present mood. She is so stirred that she forgets the man near her, forgets everything save the new conception of life forming in her, her mighty need of being alone to sift the thoughts that are crowding in upon her. She lifts her gown and turns up the slope, crosses the road, crowded with chatting people, and is only then aware that he and the dog are following her. She passes the standing-place where the droschke drivers are grouped waiting for their fares, and takes the road leading back to the town. The man scans her face with surprise; somehow it seems different to him; he tries to recall the first impression it made upon him, but cannot. He is acutely conscious of the rustle of her gown, the swing of her hips, and the varying expressions that chase one another across her face. Something of her disturbance communicates itself to him. An empty droschke comes slowly up to them; as it reaches them she holds up her hand and stops it; the driver pulls up and waits. As she stands still she notices that three little white pebbles form a triangle at her feet, and that the driver is a man who has driven her before. She is searching for something to say to this man beside her, and an unreasoning anger against herself, against him, and against the mysterious forces that make it possible for an unknown vag-

bond—she repeats the epithet to herself, it seems to mitigate her self-shame—to disturb her ; forces that she feels it is useless to struggle against, because one has no key to their origin. She notices that she is as tall as he is, and that now when she can examine him closely, he looks nervous and suffering, as if the sword is wearing the scabbard, and she feels sorry ; her face softens; she smiles as she says :

‘Adieu then, and thank you for everything you said.’ She stoops and pats the little beast’s head, and turns towards the shabby old droschke. He opens the door for her and waits, hat in hand. She steps in, and he shuts it.

‘Thank you. A pleasant journey.’ The wheels give one turn. ‘I hope you’ll find that perfect female !’ she adds mischievously ; it is the parting flippancy of her old self.

‘Au revoir, Fruen,’ is his only reply. The driver jerks the reins and urges the horse on with the peculiar noise Norsk horses seem to expect as a right. She looks back. He is still standing with the cur at his side, and something in the lonely figure standing in the quiet evening touches her. She feels a warm rush of feeling for him, a desire to be good to him. She waves her hand, and watches until he becomes a tiny speck in the twilight of the pearl-white summer night.

II



SNOW everywhere! A white world wrapped in a snowy shroud, under a grey-white sky. What a feast the gods are preparing; the last down of the wild geese breasts falls softly, silently, caressingly down, as when death comes to a little child in its sleep. A twig crackling in the wood, the brittle snap of a branch under its weight of snow, the rattling rush of icicles as it crashes to the ground, the hoarse startled call of capercailzie; every sound is as crisply distinct in the clear stillness, as a sibilant whisper in a hushed room. Every touch of colour, the crimson in a little lad's muffler, as he drags his newly-painted kjelke (hand-sled) up the hill, strikes warmly to one as the light in the window to a wayfarer on a murky night, or one's name on the lips of a sleeping lover.

A great white house nestles in the hollow like the mausoleum of a Titan under a white pall. The sun strikes discs of light off the window panes, and the steam of the beasts' breaths and skins waves out from the stalls into the frosty air to fall in feathery flakes to the ground. Every

outline is sharply defined ; there are many shades in the whiteness of the world, silver-white, golden-white, white with a grey, and white with a green in it. The sea is frozen near the land into glass-grey ridges, and further out the waves wash over the serrated edges of the last freezing ; the 'sprint' of beast, and the tell-tale impression of birds' claws mark the snow in all directions, and the heaviest animal goes with a padding step.

It is Christmas Eve ; a Sabbath stillness lies over the place. The sound of men's voices and the laughter of women float across the stillness from the farm yard. Two men are running a sheaf of wheat to the top of a pole for the birds' Christmas treat. In a country where every man is more or less a sailor, and where the driest notary can tie a 'Turk's head,' most things are done in a seaman-like way. They break into a shanty as they hoist it up. She is standing looking at them, she has on a red ski (snow-shoe) costume, hussar-braided jacket, full-pleated skirt, and knickerbockers tucked into the top of her sealskin boots. Her hair gleams brightly under her crimson cap, and her cheeks are glowing with cold and exercise. She looks a different being from the anaemic woman of three summers ago. There is a restrained energy in the very way she stands watching them. The Jomfrue is holding a little lad by the hand ; for the cripple is dead, and the children board in the village. They hoist up two more sheaves, and then one of the men asks :

'Will Fruen see how I have put up the wreaths?' They go up to a big spare room over the bakery and brewing houses. It has been scrubbed clean with silver sand, and the walls are festooned with green wreaths and flags. A monster Christmas tree is planted in a huge feeding-tub, it is covered with tinsel balls bobbing on elastic, fairies, and angels, and tapers. A pile of packages are heaped round the base.

'It's very nice, Jensen, you have made it very pretty, you must light the tapers at seven.' And Jensen, most daring of pilots on the coast, who would have been a pirate in older days, laughs with a boyish pleasure. He knows every port in the world, spins wonderful yarns of girls who broke their hearts for him in Boston, niñas who stabbed themselves in Barcelona, lassies who pined away in Glasgow, and never gets a girl in his own town to believe him. She goes to the store-room, praises Jomfrue's waffles and the great pile of 'fleadcakes,' varying in tints from golden-yellow to biscuit-brown, looks with a smile into a big room where some women are dressing the children for the evening, and then goes into her own room. She has not stilled her heart-ache, nor has she forgotten him, but she has found a use for herself. She has turned the many spare rooms of her big house into dormitories, where a limited number of waifs and strays, generally nameless, find a temporary or permanent home. At first her friends laughed at her 'new freak,' and gave her till Christmas to go on with it,

but when the new year went, and the summer followed the spring, and the year ran its circle, and she only paid flying visits to the city, looking stronger and bonnier each time, they allowed there might be something in it. That she would be eccentric in her way of carrying out her scheme was only to be expected, and there were both smiles and headshakings when she espoused the cause of all women, without reference to character or exhortations to repentance. It began when Captain Sörensen turned his pretty daughter out of doors. She took her in, and kept her until the trouble was over, and when Morten Ring went up to read to her, and she found the girl shaken with sobs, before the scathing power of his ranting eloquence, she took him by the collar of his coat and put him out of doors, with a definite intimation to keep off her property. Then a gypsy woman brought her newly-born in her apron, and craved admission, and so the thing grew of its own accord. It gave rise to much concern amongst the orthodox members of the various orthodox beliefs in the commune, and the pastor, as representative of the state church, felt compelled to broach the subject of service to her. He chose a sunny forenoon when the hum of early summer filled the air to ask if there was no morning service.

'No morning service!' she replied, with her great eyes dancing with mirth. 'No morning service! Why, it began at eight, and it is going on now.' And she took him out to a large bright

room in an outbuilding. Half a dozen women sat at spinning-wheels, two worked at weaving machines in the end of the room, and some children rolled about the floor on rugs, and fought and chuckled as children will. And the rhythmical tread of the women's feet, and the whirr of the wheels, mingled with the wooden beat of the weaving machine, and the twitter of the birds through the open windows from the wood at the back. And she swung the children up in her long strong arms, opened a great press, and showed him neat piles of linen and flannel, towels woven after the old patterns, that are better than the new ; flax from Russia, and balls of fine yarn, and a ledger with orders for work.

'To-day is Wednesday, Herr Pastor, your church has been closed since Sunday, except for the christening of a baby, and the funeral of a granny ; mine is open every day, and all day, and my sinners laugh and sing, and find new hopes and self-reliance in measure as they better their work, and then chicks will grow up to be proud of their mothers. For'—with a mischievous smile—'the fathers were only an accident. I can trust you and society to look after them, to welcome the erring rams to the fold ; the mothers are my look out. Fathering is a light thing to the man, as light as the plucking of a flower by the wayside ; he enjoys its colour, its perfume, then flings it aside, and goes his way and forgets it. The act of the butterfly that flits from flower to flower, deposits the pollen on the blossom, and

flies to another. The flower withers and dies, and the seed bursts the ovary, and drops into the kind earth, sleeps through the winter, and wakes to life with the kiss of spring. But the human flower has to live and carry the burden of its conception through months of fear, winters, and summers, and springs of disgrace. Yet she is the flower of humanity; he, but the accessory. Yes, I know what you are going to say, Herr Pastor, I see it on your lips, it's a stock church phrase, "Man is the head of the woman, etc." St. Paul had something to do with that heresy, hadn't he—well, I don't believe him a bit. Her maternity lifts her above him every time. Man hasn't kept the race going, the burden of the centuries has lain on the women. He has fought, and drunk, and rioted, lusted, and satisfied himself, whilst she has rocked the cradle and ruled the world, borne the sacred burden of her motherhood, carried in trust the future of the races. And, if she has sometimes failed in it?—well, she was lonely, and there was no one to point her a way. The only sign-post man ever raised for her was: "Please me, that is the road to my heart; curb the voice of your body, dwarf your soul, stifle your genius and the workings of your individual temperament, ay, regulate your conscience in accordance with mine and my church, be good, and I will feed you and clothe you in return for your services; what more can a woman desire?" And if sometimes the untamed spirit looked out of a woman's eyes, and she spurned his offer, he

took care to cry: "She is a traitor to the sex I have moulded in my hand for centuries!" And if her own sex joined in the cry, small blame to them to curry favour with their bankers. Spinning is a good thing for women, they always want something to keep time to their vagabond thoughts, for in measure as they possess the dear old devil, in the same measure they need excitement. Monotony is the biggest trump card in the hand of the devil when his design is the seduction of woman.'

'But does Fruen think it is wise to encourage them in, in —'

'Promiscuous mothering? Fie, Herr Pastor, you know I don't, but you would be a much more clever man than you are, and I a much more clever woman, if you could allot the measure of blame or responsibility. Take Strine. A lump of emotional inclination, without a grain of reasoning power or resistance; the daughter of a drunken father and an epileptic mother; at times affectible as an aspen leaf to a wind-puff—and yet not a bad mother. What do you and the commune do for such as she? You give her a few pence a week, place her in the poor-house in an atmosphere of evil talk and worse associations, or let her tramp the roads or sink to beggary—and insinuating tinkers. I think music and dancing and laughter and work lead to decent living; a fig for your stool of repentance! I know you don't agree, Herr Pastor, but we are doing very well; my colony of sinners almost pay for themselves—

Svendsen'—the pastor gasps with horror—'is a good ploughman, not half a bad carpenter, and he makes decent boots for the chicks. You never could do anything with him, because you preached temperance at him and gave him his tobacco rolled up in a tract. He gets his ale and his tobacco here in payment for his work.'

The pastor is only a mortal man, with a very plain wife and a large family, and when she turns the battery of her luminous laughter-lit eyes on him, he may be forgiven for forgetting his homily; besides, her offering is the biggest in the parish.

'Will Herr Pastor take Fruen some peas and a couple of ducks?' and the pastor was evasive in his replies to the inquiries of his female parishioners as to how she took his advice.

'Poor man, he's very susceptible!' she says to Aagot with a laugh, as they watch his white ruff vanish down the path.

She is justly proud of her success; the whirr of wheels and the laughter of children, the farm upon which they all work in the brief harvest time, the necessity of watchfulness, fill her life. There is a sense of power in directing it. And if in quiet hours, when the swallows wing southwards, or the storm lashes the waves into leaping white-crested horses, and the rain beats against the windows of her house, she may have felt a kind of loneliness creep over her, some call upon her time is sure to disperse it.

She goes up to her own room; nothing reveals

a woman's character more fatally than her bedroom. There is the room that is almost ascetic in its bareness ; the room that has a smell of clean linen and lavender, the very ornaments of which are treasured from girlhood, the old workbox, water-colours and girlish souvenirs ; attachment to things for association's sake, explaining the expression of youth that is still in the face of the matron who owns it. Then there are rooms all mirrors and Cupids, rose-silk quilts and lace, and ribbons, and heavy perfume, like the stage bedroom of a cocotte, so that one longs to open the window and thrust out one's head and draw a long breath. Her room is a large room with four windows looking south and west ; her arm chair is turned to the southern windows looking seawards and roadways as if some day some one might come that way. Everything in the room is white, from the narrow white bed to the big white wardrobe with glass doors, showing the shelves with their store of dainty underclothing and the row of boots and shoes on the lower shelf. There is something odd about it, a sort of frank revealing of the woman's self ; it is spotless, and clean, and attractive.

There is a writing table between the windows, and a man's head in a frame. It has been cut out of a magazine and mounted. Her crack-brained poet ! His last book of vagabond ditties and a pile of reviews are lying on her desk. She looks at it wistfully and then dresses and goes down. Many sleighs will dash up with a merry jingle to share her Christmas cheer. A magistrate from

a neighbouring district, a young doctor, a solicitor, and a big timber merchant, all bachelors with a keen appreciation of the comfortable income of the lonely Frue with the estate on the fjord. The daylight is fleeting rapidly, the curtains are drawn, and the birch logs are sizzling in the great white porcelain stove with a fragrant wood-wild smell. She slides back the door and lets the firelight dance into the dim room ; everything in it is old, for she has merely added to the antique furniture she found in it, and it holds treasure dear to any antiquary. A case is filled with silver quaint bridal cups and rings and marvellous filigree brooches ; the flame dances over the gold dragons on some leather chairs. There are spoils in it from all the ports of the world. She looks very big in her crimson gown, with its long full folds and tiny border of sable. It is spun and woven on her own place, and she is very proud of it ; she has put sheep on a rocky bit of land and the wool is dyed after an old recipe. She is pleasantly tired, for she rises early and her self-imposed duties are many. Her thoughts go back to that midsummer day, three years and a half ago, when the contemptuous words of a strange man stung her to self-scrutiny. She can see a gorgeous glowing picture of that summer scene, the water and rocks and trees, the man and the cur, in the heart of the fire. She looks back to herself and laughs softly at her discontent and weariness and the trouble she used to take to find amusement. She has not reached her present stage without

weariness and discouragement, but considering the time the result is marvellous. It has cost her pains and anxiety to set her scheme for helping wretched sisters out of the mire. She had to cut down many luxuries to set it in working order ; and she has discovered that the very qualities that made her social success, her personal magnetism, have stood to her here. She has witched the men of the district to help her in many ways and been indifferent or politely disagreeable when the women interfered. She has found scope for the varied sides of her nature. Her man of business croaked of expenditure and disaster, and she laughingly promised to reconsider her refusal of himself and his flourishing concern when bankruptcy came. He is forced to acknowledge that the thing almost pays for itself and that his chances are remoter than ever. Jomfrue has been her loyal companion ; she is cautious and not emotional, and it takes tact to find work fitted for each.

She has looked out eagerly for every scrap of news about him or his books. Men have come and wooed and ridden away ; something tells her to wait, just wait. She scarcely knows what she expects, sometimes she tells herself nothing—and yet better so. Sometimes at night she wakes and a shadow drops on her soul and weighs her down, and in the gloom she can see his face staring wildly, wild-eyed, pale-lipped, with dank, tossed hair. She has a fancy that she gets nearer to him in her sleep, that her spirit finds his and draws

him to her by force of will and love. But not always sadly: once she dreamt that she was out in a boat with him, out in a sunlit harbour, he and she alone, and as they looked back to the land, a crowd of people were there, and the women called her names and beckoned to him to go back. Their sail was shaped like a silver crescent and every rope was twined with moss and roses, and their oars were like the forked pinions of a giant white bird; and they sailed out through the breakers and the rocks, and his face was lit with a strange light as if his fancies burned through it as light through a crystal cruse; and the dream look stole over it, and he began to improvise a song, a wild exultant song of self, the glory of solitude, individual life and the love of one woman; forgetting aught else. And she was forced to take the helm and steer through the shoals, out with the wind to the open sea towards an island of delight. When they came there she cast anchor, a golden anchor, and threw out a net that gleamed like spiders' webs in the dew of morning, and she hauled in a shoal of silvern fish with scales glittering as mother-of-pearl and opals; and once when it was too heavy she asked his help and he gave it, marvelling at what she had done; forgetting to thank her in the inspiration of a new song of Home. And when they had eaten and sat resting in a grotto, he was still singing, and she was the goddess of his muse, the quell of living waters out of which he drew fresh strength for new lays. And the sea-birds dipped and mewed over the

waters, and one hovering near her cried : 'I am older than many cycles, I have seen much, I have followed many ships and dipped in many harbours. I have flown with the brent geese before the north wind and exchanged tales. It was I who whispered Hans Andersen the tale of the Fisher Maiden as he sat on the strand one day. He got the credit, but it was I who told him, for I knew her. I knew her when she dived 'neath the waves, a glad sea-child, and I saw her the morning she waded on shore with her pretty new feet, and I saw her wince as the knife-dart pierced them at each step, for the love of the Earth-prince. Many a night when the shadows danced in the moonlight she stole from his side and laved her feet in the sea of her childhood ; as women dream of girlhood days before sorrow came with the burden of their love. And your poet too is an earth-prince, and the price you pay will be even as great as the Sea Maiden's, for that is the toll women pay to poets—they are the sheep that are shorn of the wool that the poet weaves into a web of fanciful hues—'

Then she woke and laughed with moist eyes, for she knows that it is only in her dreams that such fancies come to her ; in her waking hours she is a practical creature with little imagination. The dusk draws closer round the room, and she is filled with tender, regretful thoughts of the man who woke her out of her blind sleep ; she wonders where he is spending his Christmas, and whether any one will think of a gift for him ; she fancies him

alone, when the Christmas tree is lit in all the homes, and a yearning tenderness fills her heart ; she steps to the window and looks out into the gloom ; no moon is visible, but many lights gleam across the snow, and she remembers that the Christmas candles are lit in the windows above, and the tapers must be soon kindled in the tree ; so she gathers him into her heart again, for she has laid aside dreaming, and goes out to the kitchen where Aagot reigns supreme. She looks in without being seen. Jensen has a child on each knee, singing :

‘An elephant sitting on a hickory stick,
Picking his teeth with a horseshoe pick,
And a by baby by—’

He gives a rather free translation of it in Norsk, adding, ‘I learnt that from a Boston lady,’ an exclamation which is met with shouts of laughter and a broadside of witty chaff from the cattle-girl. She is in gala dress, and wears all her quaint silver ornaments ; she is stirring the Christmas porridge with a ‘spirtle,’ made from a tiny fir tree. Aagot is brewing ale posset, for servants and guests share alike this evening. Her heart warms as she looks round her big kitchen, filled with people all dependent on her in some way, and she steps forward into the light to be greeted by the cooing of the children.

The third Yule day has drawn to a close. There has been no need of a snow plough, for the sleighs coming and going with jingling bells have kept

the roads clear. She has held open house, and had little time for thought. There will be no regular work until the New Year has gone, and it is just at such times her people need looking after. It is late, and they have all gone to bed ; she and Aagot have been talking, and the latter has just gone up stairs. She has pulled up the blind ; there is a bright moon, and every bush looks as if fretted in silver. She is disinclined to go to bed, and paces up and down the long room ; she keeps listening for something, and a feeling, not the inexplicable dread that chills one's flesh and makes one's heart throb with a sick beat in lonely rooms, rather a suspensive presentiment, oppresses her. Suddenly she stops, with a stifled scream, in the middle of the room, and stares at the window ; two gleaming eyes meet hers. She is too frightened to stir ; then there is a whine and a scratching of paws as the dog—she sees now it is a dog—slips back off the frozen snow on the low window sill.

She steps to the window and raps on the pane ; the dog answers with a yelp, and looks up with one ear flapping. She catches her breath, and a sick fear seizes her ; she runs to the garden room, unbolts the door and whistles ; the dog comes trotting up lamely. There is a bit of paper tied to its collar, she undoes it and reads : 'Send kariol to old road through wood beyond church on K—— road.' 'Seven miles away, he must be hurt ; why did the dog come to me ?' There is one farm and the posting station between. They

may have gone to bed at the farm, and there is a savage dog at the posting station ; he probably kept the little brute off. She stoops to pat her, and the little beast trots backwards and forwards and whines ; she tries to seize her, but she shows her teeth and snarls. She runs upstairs to Aagot's room, the latter is half undressed. She explains rapidly. Aagot says, taking up her skirt :

'I'd best go down and rouse up Henrik, he can take the dog with him.'

'No, no, I am going myself. I know who it is ; come down and help me to put in a horse, and get a blanket, and some brandy, and a hot water tin ; oh, do hurry, Aagot !'

She is the woman again whom Aagot has grown to look upon as a memory, for she is quivering with excitement and impatience. The stolid little woman eyes her with grave disapproval.

'Fruen must not go alone ; take Henrik ; it is late, and there are often rough tramps !'

'We are losing time as it is, Aagot ! I tell you I know who it is, it's the man in the picture in my room. Supposing your Swede were lying there, *you* wouldn't hesitate ! It would be quite twenty minutes before you could rouse Henrik. Give the dog something whilst I get on my things and light the lantern.' Something of her eagerness communicates itself to the other woman, and a few minutes later they are crossing the yard towards the stable. The dog keeps trotting restlessly about, whining pitifully.

'Take Brownie, Fruen—she's sure-footed—and

the double sleigh!' She holds up the lantern as they search for the harness. They both start as a voice calls sharply:

'Who's there, who's in the stable?' and the cattle-girl appears at the door with a lantern slung round her neck, armed with a two-pronged fork. She grins and shows all her white teeth as she sees them: 'O Fruen, I thought it was thieves; that Henrik had left the door unbolted. I am sleeping in the stall to-night. Brindle has dropped a calf; Fruen is lucky to have a heifer calf so early, a fine stout calf, and the mother is doing well.' She has been getting down harness as she talks on, from a kind of delicacy to avoid appearing inquisitive.

'You are shaking, Frue. We'll do this if you go in for the things,' says Aagot. 'Lord! what creatures we women are! The Lord send her safe back!' she prays as she strives with buckles and straps. The cattle-girl is as strong as a man; she pulls out the sleigh, backs the horse, and fastens the nose of the great bearskin to the front of the sleigh, and the claws at the back.

'Come here, Bikkje' (little bitch), she calls to the dog; her quick intelligence has grasped something of the case. 'You're a queer bred 'un, you are, but you might be as true as the best of 'em!' she calls in her odd dialect.

'If Fruen is going alone, best slip Bulldoggen; he'd frighten the devil with that ugly snout of his!'

'Ay, Gunhild, you might do that; but the Bikkje?'

'He won't harm her if I pat her; here, Bikkje; here, little woman!'

She comes out and steps in; Gunhild hands her the reins, and Aagot fastens the bearskin, and the dog limps alongside, and the bulldog follows, and they are off. The two women watch her till she turns round the wood. The Jomfrue's lips move: 'The Lord guide her safely through the dark places!'

'Go in, Jomfrue, and keep up the fires; I'll warm my coffee kettle, and give me a bottle of ale for Brindle. Ale is the best thing for a lady in her condition. Go in and don't be foolish.'

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She drives as in a wild dream through an enchanted world, such as one has read of in fairy tales, a world in which the snow-queen and the frost-king and the rime-elves reigned and the woods are witched. The snow glistens as if tons of diamond dust had been scattered over it, and the moon shines full on the sea to the left, then the road swerves to the right, and winds through the wood. The firs and pines grow thickly on each side of her. There is not a whisper in the air, for the runlets are frozen, and hang in crystal spikes over the rocks and boulders that lie here and there. Each tree stretches out its arms laden with snow, with a fringe of green underneath and crystal bugles of glistening ice. A funeral has passed that way, and branches of fir and ivy leaves lie at intervals on the white road. It touched her painfully, and she gave a great deep sob, and sent the

whip smartly across Brownie's flanks. They dart ahead, and when they reach the foot of the hill a pitiful howl reaches her, answered by a deep bark from Bulldoggen. She looks back away down the white road ; a yellow brown speck toils wearily on three legs ; she stops, and when the faithful little beast reaches her, she stoops and seizes her by the scruff of the neck, and drags her up on to her lap. She whines and resigns herself, and they dash on again.

The bells jingle merrily as they glide past the sleeping farm on the left, past the posting station, where a hound bays deeply as they glide by, past the ferry where the fjord is frozen over—a strange quiet drive, skimming along with the horse's feet sinking noiselessly into the soft oversnow, and the straight pine trunks rising like the masts of ice-bound ships in a frozen sea. She stoops and kisses the top of Bikkje's head ; she grudges Brownie a breathing spell. At length they reach the wood, and she can see the ruins of the old church sacred to Mary in pre-Lutheran times ; the snow is blown by the wind into fantastic shapes about the tombstones, as if the dead beneath had risen and found it cold, and huddled to sleep in their shrouds again. The old road leads to the right. Bikkje is getting excited.

'All right, little one !' she whispers ; 'we'll soon be there !'

The disused road is uneven, and the sleigh goes down on one side ; there is not a sign of a footprint. She lets Brownie find her way, and fastens one

end of a long silk scarf to the dog's collar. Her heart is beating painfully, surely he must be near here, she is sick with suspense, and she keeps her eyes on the dog. There is a way to the right in summer, and there is a heap of timber and brushwood piled into a stack in there. Turning will be impossible if she goes further, she halts and holds the dog by the end of the scarf; the latter is bristling with impatience, and makes frantic efforts to get loose. She undoes the skin and gets down, her ankles sink in the loose snow, the dog strains, and as she advances she can see the mark of her paws, so she lets her go and darts forward herself, knocking against the branches in her haste, and scattering the icicles with a clatter like hailstones, and in a second she is on her knees beside him. He is sitting with his back to the brushwood, fast asleep, with his chin buried in the collar of his fur-lined coat.

His face looks ghastly under his peaked cap, Bikkje is licking his hand, and she moans and croons over him, and tries to rouse him; she shakes him, he moans stupidly, and half opens his lids only to close them again. She springs up to run for her flask, when she notices that one boot is lying next him, he has taken it off and wrapped his foot in a plaid muffler. 'That explains it,' she reasons as she darts back, 'he wrenched his foot and took off the boot; how will I get him into the sleigh?' She plunges into the snow, seizes Brownie's head, and strains and pulls, and turns the sleigh and backs it as near the path as possible.

Bikkje is licking his face, and he lifts one hand in feeble protest. She kneels and forces some spirit through his lips ; it makes him cough and rouses him. He looks up stupidly, with the tears running down his cheeks. ‘Drink !’ she says, and this time he takes it and drains the cup. She is afraid the drowsiness will steal over him again ; she says slowly and distinctly :

‘You must lean on me, and try to get to the sleigh, do you hear ?’

‘Yes,’ but he makes no effort to rise. She shakes him, Bikkje growls. He tries to rise, but presses on his sore foot, and falls back with a moan.

‘My God !’ wringing her hands. ‘What shall I do ?’

She picks up his boot, valise, and stick, and runs back to the sleigh ; the moon has gone in behind a cloud, and the wood is dark and shadow-filled, and there is no sound save the jingle of the bells when Brownie shakes her head or stamps her feet. She unclasps her cloak and throws it on the seat, and darts back as a crimson shadow through the gloom.

He is lying as she left him, she stoops, and seizing him by the shoulders, turns him round ; the ground slopes towards the sleigh, but it is a good way, and she is going to try to drag him there. She crosses the hurt foot over the other ankle, gets him into a sitting position, and puts her arms under his and begins to drag him down. The blood rushes to her face, she thanks heaven it

is over snow. She strains patiently, looking back over her shoulder to see that she does not get out of line with the sleigh ; props him against it, goes round to the other side, gets in and bends over him. He groans, and she forces some more brandy through his teeth ; he drinks, the movement, possibly the pain, has roused him ; he turns his head and tries to see her ; Bikkje barks excitedly.

'Try to get in, the sleigh is very low, don't try to stand, try to sit up on it, then I'll manage.'

She puts her arms under his armpits and tries to raise him ; he does succeed in getting in, he sees what is wanted of him, and manages to get on to the seat. She puts the blanket and valise under his feet, fastens the skin on his side ; Bikkje has got in of her own accord. He leans back exhausted. She leads Brownie to the end of the road, turns her head homewards, gets in and gathers up the reins. The moon is out again weaving light as with a silver shuttle. She looks at his face ; the outlines are sharp as bleached bone, the eyes are sunken, and the same helpless child-like expression that touched her the first time is more accentuated than ever. Brownie needs no guiding, she scents home, and knows every turn of the way. She throws back her cloak from her shoulders, and passes her arm round him and draws his head on to her shoulder. 'Tzuk, tzuk, Brownie, old girl !' she urges, without looking up.

'He must have been ill,' she thinks, and she croons over him. 'Oh, my poor love, my poor, poor love !' She remembers how she has wished

all through the changing moons that have waxed and waned since they parted in the twilight of that eventful white summer night, wished with a strength that was prayer to have him again. Some of the strange dread of fate, the fetich fear that lies deeper in our souls than our new religion or civilised codes, wakes in her, and she whispers to herself, with a dread chilling her heart : 'Have I wished him, willed him harm, by wishing him to myself, wished another fate than destiny held in store.' And she makes a sort of bargain with fate to suffer anything if only he be spared her ; this vagabond, lost on a summer night and found in the moonlit snow ; and a hot tear splashes from her lashes on to his face, she bends and rubs it off with a caressing touch of her cheek, telling herself he will never know.

It is warm under her cloak, and her body is one glow of heat; his half-frozen limbs sting him as he begins to thaw again. They pass the ferry : 'Tzuk, tzuk, Brownie, old girl !' Soft little flakes are beginning to fall, they touch her face like shy cool fingers, and she feels in her heart that she would gladly drive on for ever thus with his head on her breast. The idea comes to her, 'if her sleeping friends could only see her,' and she laughs an odd exultant laugh as she thinks how they lie tucked under their eider downs, whilst she is gliding through the white woods to the rhythm of bells and light of moonbeams in crystal lustres, with her prince asleep on her heart. He stirs, she looks down, his eyes are wide open, and gaze

wonderingly up at her. There is no recognition in them. She is glad, and yet there is a little sting of pain in the knowledge. She forgets that she looks big and bonny, with clear eyes and glowing cheeks, and that the waves of her hair under her fur-trimmed cap are frosted with rime. He rubs his cheek against the fur, and smiles drowsily.

‘Are you the Snow Queen?’

‘Perhaps. Shut your eyes and sleep, and when you wake you’ll know.’

‘I do know lillemor’ (motherkin), ‘only I forgot.’

Her joy changes to alarm; he is wandering back to snow queens and the little mother of early childhood. She urges on the mare with sharp jerk of rein and encouraging cries, and she answers and flies ahead scattering the loose snow like foam. A light gleams at the turn of the wood near home, and as she nears it Gunhild cries, with a tone of relief in her voice :

‘God be praised, Frue, I was going to leave Brindle and take the road after you.’

She springs on to the back of the sleigh with her lantern swinging at her waist. ‘Jomfrue has been on her knees ever since,’ she says, as they drive up to the door.

Aagot rushes out; the cattle-girl gets down.

‘I’ll take Brownie out, Frue, she’s very warm; he won’t hurt to wait a second!’ She unharnesses the mare and leads her to the stable, they can hear her talk to her as she bustles about.

They wait in silence until she comes out and unfastens the bearskin.

‘His foot is hurt, Gunhild, mind it!’

‘No fear, Fruen, I’ll take his shoulders.’ She passes her strong arms under him ; she is as used to handling animals as other women babies, to moving great tubs of mash and carrying huge trusses of hay.

Jomfrue takes his feet and they carry him in. She follows, her shoulder is cramped and her hand has gone to sleep, and her head throbs when they get into the warm air. They carry him upstairs, and the blood rushes to the cow-girl’s face, and she breathes a bit hard when they reach the top. She makes an effort and lifts him on to the small bed. A bright streak of flickering light darts across the floor from the oven and the sizzle of wood and smell of spiced wine fill the room pleasantly. Some blankets are warming near the stove.

‘He’s a long fine-built chap, if he had any flesh on his bones !’ she remarks, drawing a long breath with her hands on her hips and the eye of a connoisseur in beasts ; then turning to Aagot :

‘You see to Frue, she mustn’t take cold, she’ll be wanted by-and-by. I’ll see to him,’ with a significant look. They leave the room and she unrolls the plaid, cuts off his sock with the scissors hanging to her belt, and feels his ankle like a bonesetter :

‘Ai yai ! that was a bad wrench.’

She feels it with the tip of her fingers, he winces and groans :

'So oh, lad, so oh, that's better, he's coming to.'

Living alone among beasts as she does, she has a habit of talking aloud. She lifts his head and forces some of the spiced wine through his teeth. She is more decisive than tender, and some of it runs down his chin and neck ; it rouses him and he drinks eagerly.

'That's the man, drink it up, and then we'll get you into the blankets.' She is taking off his clothes.

'Lean on the other foot and help yourself! Uf! men are like calves, if they've got a limb they mustn't use, that's the one they'll want to put to the ground.' She pulls him up and gets off his coat ; he stares about vacantly.

'Where am I, how did I get here? Hey, Bikkje !'

'You're where the calf was when he got in the clover field. Pull out your arms, man. Lord ! you're a skinful o' bones like a calf after the scour. You must have had water gruel for your Yule cheer.'

The wine with its fume of cardamoms and nutmeg, the strong smell of cows and stable from her clothes, and the shooting pain confuses him ; he does not answer, only fights feebly against her. She laughs and handles him like a young kid, strips him stark naked without paying the slightest heed to his remonstrances and rolls him unceremoniously in a blanket.

Jomfrue enters just as she is picking up his shirt from the floor.

'Lord sake, Gunhild, I put a shirt out of the poor cupboard.'

The cow-girl laughs: 'Not a shirt he wants yet awhile. I'll come and put one on if you're shy about it. Get some strips of old linen and dip them in cold water and wind round his foot. I'll see to Brownie and put up the sleigh and Henrik nor no one need know how he got here. Send for the old doctor by the six boat. He's more like a vet than a doctor for creatures, but he can hold his tongue. I know the old doctor. He swears by Fruen, and he's worth ten of that other whipper-snapper.'

She steals downstairs. She rises with the dawn and she has done the round of her work each day; drunk her share of raw spirit in honour of the Yule; danced vigorously each festival evening and had no sleep for two nights. Yet she makes no complaint; she is true to her nature with its splendid loyalty, sturdy independence and stubborn pride, and about as much understanding of conventional morality as the first best cow amongst her flock. She is never in the house except when the big bell rings to meals, and she brooks no interference; it is only on rare occasions where strength is wanted that she lends a hand, and she is proud of the reliance placed in her. She comes up at five with some coffee and rusks to Jomfrue; some bits of hay are sticking in her hair, for she has lain down with the newly-arrived calf for a brief sleep.

She stands and looks down at him, looks at the

palm of one of his hands, but makes no remark, and only whispers:

'Did Frue leave the note ready? That's right, I'll send Henrik. Is she asleep?'

The big house is alive with the bustle of the day. The adze rings in the wood-shed, the Swedish gardener is whistling at his carpenter's bench, for that is his winter work, and the women sing as they spin.

The jingle of bells sounds through the clear air and the doctor's kariol dashes up. He is driving a wicked black mare from the Hallingdal, half thorough-bred, that no one else can handle. He must harness, unharness and hold her while she is groomed, and once when he was away she held the yard at bay for two days, tore up two sacks of oats, and roused the village with her wild whinnying. And when he tried his first breaking, she bit off two of his fingers; and they tell yet how he and she fought it out for a day and a half and how the old doctor laid a spell on her. There is the usual scene of tramping and plunging, tossing mane and streaming tail, dogs barking and men calling: 'Look out!' before Zwarten (Black one) is safe in a stall. She watches the scene from the bedroom window and goes to the door to meet him.

'Well, what have we here? Where's your colour?' pinching her cheek. The old doctor does as he pleases. He looks down at the man in bed; his face is flushed and he is tossing his head from side to side. He feels the foot.

'That'll get all right in time! This is more serious'; he listens to his breathing, covers him up and takes out his thermometer.

'He's in for pneumonia, and by all tokens he's not long out of it. Hey, Bikkje! What the deuce are you doing there? You go down and get me a glass of that old port of yours, and a boy to ride back with me and I'll have a talk with Jomfrue about the patient.' He pushes her gently outside the door; she goes down and stands at the window looking out at the winter scene; she does not hear him come in.

'Well, Princess, who is he?' She utters his name with a rush of colour, and the old doctor purses his mouth into a whistle! 'Phew! that wild eagle, well he's like Zwarten, every one mightn't care to tackle him, but there's race in the fellow, and that's everything. There's no reckoning on women; they give the mitten to a fellow with a solid banking account, and set their hearts on a fellow that flashes like a comet and is about as seizable.'

'Well, it's like some men's taste in horseflesh, doctor!'

He laughs genially. 'True, dear lady. How did he get here? He couldn't put that foot to the ground, and he wasn't fit for much walking when it happened.'

She gave him the facts in outline.

'I know the place. How did you get him into the sleigh?'

'Dragged him!'

'The devil photograph me, did ye now! Ay, what did the old doctor tell ye : throw aside those infernal stays, take exercise and you'd be a grand woman!—and so you are—I'll come back to-night. Trust the old doc. to pull your crazy poet through for you! Only patience!'

The new year has come and gone ; twice death has poised on its sable wings over the great house, and then flapped heavily further, seeking its prey elsewhere.

The place has been hushed in silence, the spinning wheels stilled, and the women have worked in whispers, and the sleighs have dashed by like phantom vehicles without their bells. Gunhild has told them how Death came once before in the time of a mad Englishman, who had the estate before Fruen's husband came in for it: related strange tales of his death and great funeral. But now he is coming back to strength. He is beginning to ask questions ; the old doctor parries them adroitly, but he has teased more out of Jomfrue than she imagines. What is that whirring sound? he asks, and his eyes sparkle as she tells him of the women and children, and the school Fruen is going to have when they are bigger, and how everything possible is to be made on the place, and how they grow most of their own food, and how Fruen hopes to revive many of the old home industries. And for the twentieth time he asks how did he get here? It was a chance, for he and a chum used to send Bikkje down from

their mountain hut with messages to the farms in the valley. Did she come here, and who fetched him? and Jomfrue evades a reply. He has asked so often, and to-day he is to see this gracious lady. This description of the colony of women managed by a woman, going their own way to hold a place in the world in face of opinion, has fired his fancy—a wonderful song is singing in him, the rhymes fit and the verses round off, and he marvels at it himself as it works out. He fancies this song is the silver key to a golden casket, in which a rare conception waits, the best thing he has ever done, a great poem, 'an epic of the new'; and he feels a stream of sunlight flood his inner soul, and he is watching it, when a knock at his door rouses him. She enters, tall and gracious and strong, in her crimson, homespun gown, with large clear eyes shining steadily, and her clear skin flushed, and Bikkje at her heels.

She has pictured this meeting hundreds of times, fancied it on a steamer, at a friend's house, up on some fjeld tour—fancied how his eyes would light up with astonishment at the transformation in her, and how she would tell him that his words had acted as the tap of a wizard's wand, and now she is face to face with her 'crack-brained poet,' whose head has been pillow'd on her shoulder all through a witching white drive (she has felt it ever since), over whose pillow she has watched, catching the strange stray words of his delirium; she has had to pause outside the door to still the beating of her heart before entering, and his eyes

meet hers without a trace of recognition. He looks very wan and white, with his cheek and jaw bones showing sharply, and his great eyes sunken.

'Words won't thank you, dear lady, for all you have done for me. I don't understand it, I am not used to—'

She disengages her hand gently.

'To attempting an impossible walk, getting nearly frozen in the snow and catching cold, and doing all manner of foolish things. Now I should have thought those were quite characteristic of you.'

He flushes and smiles with quaint embarrassment. She has brought a bundle of papers and reviews with her.

'Now that you are better, I thought perhaps you would like to look at these, and I wondered if you wanted to write to any one. You must tell Aagot anything you want.'

'I hope I won't need to trespass on Fruen much longer—'

'You won't stir till you are quite well—you would only get a relapse, and we are quite proud of our patient. Ah, here comes the doctor!'

She goes to the window, and something in her attitude strikes a chord in his memory ; he tries to recall it, and afterwards, when she turns laughingly to the doctor, he notices it again ; it worries him, makes him nervous.

Downstairs the doctor turns her sharply to the light and scrutinises her face. Her eyes meet his

fearlessly . . . he feels her pulse and says, quiz-zically :

'That's right, Princess, one bundle of nerves in a family is quite enough. What are you going to do with him now that he is on the road to recovery? There is good stuff in the fellow, but he wants ballast.'

She colours vividly and says :

'What can I do, doctor?'

'A-ah, that's not for me to say. Women are kettle cattle, but—you've got a queer one to manage up there. I know his kith and kin. Yes,' in reply to her start of surprise, 'I knew his mother, and I guess his father, and there is race in the lad, and heart—and brains, judging from the way the penny-a-liners go for him. But they were queer ones to drive, and devils to go off at a tangent. If you take him in hand, you've got to give him a loose rein and leave the stable door open. He'll come home all right; but don't put the curb on. I've got a soft spot,' patting her shoulder, 'in my heart for you, Princess, and I know the breed.'

He buttons up his fur-lined coat, and lifting his glass, 'Skaal! your luck!' and his keen grey eyes twinkle under his bushy brows; and his rugged, coarse-grained old face is softened for a spell.

Next day, when the afternoon was drawing to a close, Aagot came to her :

'Wouldn't Fruen go up and read to him for a while? He is as restless as a new-weaned child, he keeps asking about Fruen. My head is light

with his questions, and he's working himself into a fair fever.'

She knocks, and goes in ; the papers are tossed over the bed and floor, his eyes are feverishly bright and his face is flushed, and the pillows are awry. He smiles like a pleased child when he sees her.

'I hear from Aagot that you are misbehaving, and I have come to scold,' she says, standing next the bed.

'I don't mind'—with a touch of petulant audacity—'that is better than not seeing you at all.'

She tries to look severe, and arranges the pillows without reply.

'Don't be vexed with me, dear lady'—with sudden penitence—'but Jomfrue Aagot, good as she is, is not entertaining, and the time is long, and I can't sleep !'

'Shall I read to you ?'

'Oh no, talk to me. Tell me about this scheme of yours. Jomfrue's version is a fairy tale.'

She sits and tells him of her plans, dwells on the humorous phases of its development until the room is filled with shadows, and she has an uncomfortable sense of his nearness. She rises, saying :

'To-morrow you must come downstairs, I believe you will be better there.'

'Must you go, Fruen ?'

'Yes, I must go my rounds, see women and chicks, and finish the day. Now, good-night—Aagot will bring the light—sleep well !'

Early the next afternoon he is helped down, and propped on the couch with pillows. He looks round the big room.

'I am like the beggar boy who wandered into the castle of the Fay. Where is the Princess? Aagot, thou woman of the silent tongue, thou inscrutable keeper of the secrets of the Princess, where is she?'

'If ever I saw such a restless thing! You'll hurt your foot and be another three weeks.' (There is a significant stress in her voice.) 'You were anxious enough to get off a while ago, I couldn't keep you quiet—now lie still, there are lots of books; ring the bell if you want anything.'

'But, Aagot,' catching her gown, 'dear, good Aagot, where is the Fruen? isn't this her room? Aagot, you are the unkindest of kind women!' wriggling a pillow on to the floor.

'Fruen went away early this morning; she won't be back till later on—no, I must go.'

Half an hour later she answers the bell.

'Move me nearer the window, Aagot!'

He lies there watching the children slide down the slope, one little lad and one little maid always toil up and glide down together, tumbling into the soft snow beneath.

The shadows lengthen and the early gloom gathers, and a crescent moon, the last half, rises silently over the white world; and then the jingle of bells reaches him, and a sleigh with a pair of horses creeps round the fringe of the wood and up the drive. He sits up eagerly and watches—

watches the quiet way she handles her reins, and the firm face, touched by the moonlight, with the glisten of rime on her hair. 'A silver witch,' he mutters, 'a great strong silver witch, riding to the music of silver bells.' He listens intently, hears a door slam, and women's voices, the barking of dogs, then steps overhead. Her room perhaps. He wonders what it looks like.

Half an hour glides by, he feels an unreasonable sense of disappointment, almost of injury, as she does not come. She might in common courtesy have looked in and asked how he fared. He recalls the caress in her voice as she said good-night, the look in her eyes, as she bent over his bed, and anathematizes her for a coquette; all women are alike. Then reproaches himself for ingratitude, recalls his position, tells himself that she too must know it, he is public property, she must know that he is dependent on his pen, on his sheaves of verse that look so bonny in the growing and bear so little corn for daily bread. His mood darkens, his thoughts embitter, the silver witch of a while ago becomes the embodiment of the social force that crushes him. He chafes, he must leave, he curses his foot, his friends to whom he has written for funds, his penniless condition—for he was going to meet the coast steamer when the accident happened. The captain is an acquaintance and would have given him a ticket. He fumes and works himself into acute distress. The sound of women's laughter and the barking of a dog in play comes

into the now dark room—Bikkje's bark, ay, even the little bitch has deserted him. His temperament is as wax to receive impressions, and he sinks into despair; he starts, surely that is her voice in the next room; there is a rush of cool air, and she enters.

'All in the dark! Aagot has been so very busy, two of the children are ill; why didn't you ring?'

She slides back the stove door and stirs the logs into a blaze that lightens the room and flickers gaily through it.

'But why are you over there in the cold? You must be frozen.'

His eyes are gloomy and his face tired—how like that first day, she thinks with concern. She turns aside the rugs that lie between him and the fireplace.

'I am going to move you, the couch is on rollers, and I am very strong,' stretching out her arms with a frank pride in them.

'Ssh,' as he sits up with a remonstrance, 'I always have my own way here.' She stands at its head and taking him by the shoulders pulls him gently down again and wheels over the couch.

'Now isn't that better? I am going to have some tea, I want it badly.' She leans back as she speaks in a low chair, the glow of the logs lights up her face.

'Fruen has been for a long drive?'

'To Arendt.'

'To Arendt? Why, that is fourteen miles away; alone?'

'Yes.'

He makes no further remark, she wonders what is working in him and says:

'You are very silent, what is it? You look worried, sad, tell me—'

She disturbs him rarely, he moves restlessly and pushes his hair off his forehead—she notices that his hand trembles. She goes over and lays her hand upon it—it is burning—she feels his forehead.

'Why you are in a fever, this will never do—I shall have to send for the doctor if you go on like this. What has upset you, what is it?' There is a caress in her voice.

'Many things, dear lady, I am a fool, this amongst the rest!' pointing to a review on the end of his couch.

She takes it up and reads it, holding it in her left hand, leaving her right on his forehead. It is a notice of his latest book—an almost cruelly personal attack by a well-known critic—a cold man of keen brilliant intellect with a pen like a lancet and a faculty of biting sarcasm that wounds sensitive souls like a hornet's sting. Having no temperament himself, every thing of personal jars on him; the touch of egotism that one gladly pardons for the sake of the warm human blood flowing through the pages, the sympathy one feels lies in the writer's nature, offends some canon of taste peculiar to him. Every word of praise is

ceded grudgingly, and accompanied by a sneer. It makes her indignant as she reads it, and she throws it aside and sits down next him.

'Why should you mind that? I wouldn't let it cost me a thought. I fancied you were **above** that, that you never cared, that you always **went** to nature for comfort, that you had made friends with the great god Pan, that you despised the opinions of the ruck, that you had found **yourself** and with that peace—or didn't it work?'

He starts and stares at her, and the same puzzled expression crosses his face.

'How did you know?'

'Perhaps—I guessed. I know your books and all about you this long time. I read a good deal, you see. Once you helped me. Nothing I have done for you would ever begin to discharge my debt.'

'Helped you, Fruen, *I* helped *you*—I don't understand—'

'Yes, you helped me to find myself!'

The shadows are deep about the room, but the light from the sizzling wood in the great porcelain stove streams out across them, and shows her hands folded in the lap of the crimson gown.

'To find yourself?' he asks softly, with a boyish eager wonder in his voice.

'Yes, you drew a picture of women, you told me some unintentional home-truths, you hurt me—'

'But, dear lady!—'

'Men had never done that before, at least I was

too blind to see that much of their courtesy was the worst possible compliment to my best self. It was not to their minds or souls that I appealed, but to their senses, and their admiration sprang from that. You stung me to analyse myself, to see what was under the form into which custom had fashioned me, of what pith I was made, what spirit, if any, lay under the outer woman. To see what significance the physical changes in my body had from where the contradictions of my nature sprang—to find myself. I closed the book of my soul and what I had read there made me sorrow. I was sorry for myself, resentful because I had been reared in ignorance, because of my soul-hunger, but I had found myself all the same, and I said : From this out I belong body and soul to myself ; I will live as I choose, seek joy as I choose, carve the way of my life as I will. Aagot has told you of our life here. It has cost me much effort, but I am pretty sure of myself now. It is you men who are the dreamers. Once a girl or a woman is kissed out of the sleep of her ignorance by love or suffering—they are generally synonymous—she gets a grip on reality, she seizes the concrete in life.' She looks at him for the first time since she has spoken and adds: 'In teaching me to find myself, you taught me more than you thought, and what you taught me I am trying to teach to others. A feminine 'Umwertlung aller Werthe,' a new standard of woman's worth. Woman has cheapened herself body and soul through ignorant innocence, she must learn to worthen herself by

all-seeing knowledge. I have begun low down on the social scale, but I hope the seeds I am planting will grow into big trees with wide-spreading roots. Most churches and all social law have tended to cheapen woman, and in some measure woman has been the greatest sinner against woman by centuries of silence.'

Her voice died away and there is silence ; only his quick breathing comes from the dusk of the couch, and it seems to him that in all the world only they two exist. Her speech has taken him aback, his perceptions are in chaos. She appears to him as the embodied figure of a dream, dreamt at some past date, and he cannot place her. He once 'hurt' her, when? He tries to think what he could have written that touched her.

'But, lady, that I should hurt you, I don't understand.'

'Ah, that is a thing of the past ; now I am fortified against hurt, because I know I am in the right. I owe you a thank-you for that'—her cool hand meets his nervous shaking one and grasps it firmly—'and I mean to give it you when I can.'

She rises and lights the lamp and rings :

'They have forgotten me on the children's account !'

A maid brings in the tray with an apology from Aagot. She pours out some tea and waits upon him, and as she leans forward and says, 'Sugar?' the same tantalising memory rises to puzzle him. It makes him silent, it gets between him and his thoughts, irritates him.

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She takes his empty cup and puts the small table away.

'Would the whirr of a wheel irritate you?'

'No, Fruen, no,' he says absent-mindedly, he is exerting his whole will to try and find the clue. She has an old black spinning-wheel, with ivory knobs ; she moves her foot with steady rhythm, and she feeds it with the ivory white curls of well-carded wool with a beautiful action of hands. He watches her with a kind of fascination, and the song of the wheel sings soothingly in his thoughts.

'Few ladies spin now,' he remarks.

'No ; I am not very good at it, I am only learning. The wool in my gown holds all my first attempts—I like it ; I span an awful lot of thoughts into it, much of my old self, and when it was finished I was new.'

He makes no reply ; he is still endeavouring to find the clue. Bikkje supplies it ; she patters with tapping claws across the waxed floor and rubs against her ; she stops to pat her, the little beast licks her wrist and then trots over to him ; their eyes meet, she flushes, and the whole scene comes back to him in a flash—lapping fjord, music of water and trees, and the woman with the laugh of a child, who looked so like a fashion-plate. He sits up in his astonishment, crying :

'Now I remember—but is it possible? No ; it can't be. You are so changed ; and yet now you smile I see it plainly, and marvel I did not see it before. And that is what you meant by "hurt"

—I was rough, I remember,' with a sort of hesitation—

'Go on,' she smiles encouragingly.

'You irritated me, I was hurt, I was bitter—I am always getting hurt and getting bitter,' with rueful humour. 'You embodied that section of society that had discarded me . . . you—' with desperation—'powdered and painted, and your waist was absurd—but your eyes, your eyes and your smile are the same—that is why I have been puzzling—it is wonderful, like a fairy-tale, and even now I do not understand.'

'That your words should have worked so great a transformation, no,' remembering the why *his* words more than another man's, she adds softly, 'no, perhaps you do not quite understand that! But it is none the less true; but you, all this time I have been finding myself, how is it you have grown less secure, how have you lost your grip of mother nature? Did your philosophy go lame on the journey?' She has risen and is moving about the room, drawing the curtains closer. His eyes follow her, her hair shines so in the light, her supple figure sways as she moves.

'No; but, dear lady, I cannot stop looking at you, it is so strange. You have grown, I believe. Your bust is fuller, your hips—ah, your corset is gone. You look so strong, so capable—you are half a woman, it is wonderful—I *begin to fear you!*'

She throws back her head and laughs, stands with her hands clasped behind her back, perhaps

conscious of the lines of her own grand figure, and looks at him.

‘Methinks, Poet, the pupil has distanced the master !’

‘Ah, that is sure ! I must have been blind not to see !’ his eyes fill, and she forgets everything but that ; and goes over and kneels next him and says :

‘Tell me why it is you seemed so sure then, and now you look as if everything had gone awry with you. Even your books have less of joy, less of truth in them, less of grip at the world’s heart, the grip that made them touch mine and got you a name.’

He is won by her frank appeal and bares his heart, perhaps for the first time, even to himself. All that has lain smouldering there through lad years and man years till now. She marvels at the strange tangles of his poet nature, the child, and man, ay, the woman in it—at the dreams of the man ; the cobwebs spun over the ore ; and he little dreams, as he tells her, that she is weighing her life as it is, as it may be, with possible sorrows and joys deliberately in the balance, and that she chooses her course.

‘Have you ever told this to any one ?’

‘No, dear lady, I have few close friends.’

‘You want a home, you are not fit to be alone. Your body and spirit wage war. The scabbard is too frail for the sword. Yet you need freedom, freedom to go when you will, but you ought to have a place to return to. There must be no

more waiting in the snow,' with a tender smile, that sets his pulses stirring. 'Now you are tired, and must talk no more, and I need to think before I tell you my plan. Hush! lie still, and I will play for you.'

Some days later he is hobbling from room to room on a crutch. Aagot wishes him away, that is sure. He leans against the window, looking out at the snow; the sun is bright to-day, and he is thinking of something she said in the morning. She asked him point-blank to go into the disused smoking-room when some ladies came up the drive. It set him thinking, and he realises he must leave. He has had a glorious rest, but he is still weak, and the world outside looks less inviting than ever. That she cares for him he knows; that he touched her in some way acutely at that first meeting, her whole life since shows; but is she not less approachable in her new womanhood than ever? She has found fresh interests, new duties, an ambition, and, if he judge her rightly, no love will ever satisfy her wholly; it will never be more than one note; true, a grand note, in the harmony of union; but not the harmony. The whole man in him is touched by this new creature his stray words have waked into life: this grand, fearless, wholesome woman, with a clear head and sure hand to guide the great house and its many inmates. He is proud of her, she is the woman he dreamt of; but what has he to offer her instead?

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In a dream it was easy for her to say : ‘Come with me, woman,’ but come to what?—beggary?

He knows the place, her ambitions, her plans. He can’t say : ‘Let me share it !’ He has nothing to offer her ; he remembers their first meeting, he would give all he has ever dreamt of to try and show her how he thinks of her now ; but he must go. How he dreads the loneliness, the bare room in some cheap lodging house, the feeling of loss. It must be, he shrinks from it because he is still ill. Aagot comes in for him to sign the receipt of a registered letter. She looks significantly at him. He reads her unspoken thought ; she hopes he will go now that his money has come. He sits still and reproaches himself for his cowardice, and yet is he not now, at the supreme moment of his life, swayed as much by conventional considerations as the pettiest bourgeois stickler for usage. If she care, does he not insult her by thinking his poverty would weigh with her ? Well, he will tell her in his verse, he will glorify her as no woman before, but she must, if she is to be his queen, exercise her prerogative and speak—it is hard—he will give himself this one day, and to-morrow he will leave.

She has been thinking over it, she knows what is working in him, for love makes a woman as wise as a serpent. No consideration of outside people or his circumstances has any weight with her ; she is only weighing the effect of it on her own life and work ; she is not willing to leave the plough she has set herself to guide. She realises

well that his love, no matter if it be his whole love, will not fill her life completely ; she has seen too many marriages not to know that every woman, except the few that go to prove the rule, chafes at the narrowness of the horizon that is simply confined to attending to one man's needs. She recalls the words of a cynical woman friend of hers : ' Nothing is so conducive to make a woman content with her husband as a platonic friendship with a decent other fellow, or a hobby of some sort. It gives her an interest, saves her from being bored to extinction by his fidelity.'

She sees his faults clearly, she knows that marriage with him will bring her a measure of happiness such as she has never held before ; but she is not willing to go into old - fashioned bondage. She has no illusions about him ; she is too thoroughly a woman to take him very seriously ; she laughs as she thinks of him, laughs tenderly and softly, her comic great child, child in his greatest moments, with a little of the child's desire for praise, a little of the child's ' show-off,' happiest when fooled for his own good, capable of being driven along the roughest road, if only the reins are silken—she feels a desire to make the world good for him ; she will go and look for him.

He turns as she enters the room ; their eyes meet, for she is tall as he.

' Dear lady, I must go to-morrow, I ought to have gone before ! '

' Why ? '

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'Because I ought to have considered you—people—'

She laughs, such a light caressing laugh, and goes nearer to him.

'Have you been well content here? And is that the only reason? I care nothing for them, that care is a thing of the past.'

He looks at her with shining eyes.

'Am I more to you than the world's opinion?'

Her eyes drop.

'Put on your things, they are in the hall, and I will show you!'

She speeds away like an arrow, and he hears her voice outside and her step overhead, and presently she comes down in her crimson cloak and fur-trimmed cap, and she hands him a great soft fleecy, silk scarf, so fine and sweet-smelling that he handles it fearsomely; she takes it out of his hand with a laugh, throws it over his head and fastens it under his coat, without looking at him; he feels as if she has taken the power to breathe from him, as if her own soft warm arms are about his neck and her breath on his breast. He follows her and seats himself without a word in the sleigh next her, but he has a feeling as they drive off, that curious looks are following them, and he looks at her to see if she too is conscious of it. Her cheeks are vivid with colour, her lips are parted as if uttering the words of some inner song. When they reach the end of the wood, she swerves sharply to the left and drives towards the village, draws in the horses and drives slowly.

Already her intention has its effect. A woman pops out her head over a half door, vanishes to reappear with another head behind her.

'Frue,' he says, and his voice shakes, 'dear lady, is it wise of you?'

She turns and reads his eyes searchingly.

'It only rests with you to make it foolish.'

After that he gives himself up to the exultant gladness that surges up in him ; he neither sees the curious glances of the men in the street, or the eyes of the women in the windows as they return, he only knows that he is bound on a wonderful white journey, through a glorious white world, to the chime of silver bells, a betrothal journey with his queen. Neither of them speaks, but both look up to the house as they dash past the gate and smile, and then on through the wood. It is a strange silent drive, as if both hearts are too full of a sacred, wonderful music they fear to disturb by common words. He feels as if the sun in his soul is so warm that it might transform the winter landscape into summer, radiant, passionate summer. At the old road she turns, and they drive silently back ; the sun burns like a dull red globe as it hangs suspended in the grey sky, shedding a shiver of red across the grey space. And it is dark with the sudden fall of the winter night when they reach home and the lights stream to meet them in welcome from every window. She meets Aagot on the stairs and stoops and kisses her, for the very love of every human thing welling up in her soul for his sake.

Why should she trouble what the world says—after all one's world is only as big as one can grasp it—why worry over the rule of waiting to be wooed ; a relic of the days of capture by force. She owes the world not a thank-you, why wound him by a silence for a convention's sake ?

She pauses a moment before she goes into the room. She has changed her gown for a long soft white woollen one with quaint silver clasps ; it is open and shows her strong white throat. There is something about her makes him stand up as she enters. She waits with a quaint proud shyness for him to speak.

' What does it mean, dear lady ? what does it mean ? I am dazed.'

' As much or as little as you will.'

' Are you sure ?'

' I am quite sure.'

' And if I should tire, and the song in me stifle, and the curse of my restlessness come over me again—'

' You will go and I will wait, until you weary and come home again !'

' And if my fancy waver—if I seek new eyes and new lips——' His eyes pierce her soul ; she pales white as her gown and the ruby in the heart-shaped pendant on her breast flashes as it rises.

' You will be free to go.'

' Free man ?'

' Free man'—with pride—' and free woman !'

' And what do you ask me for this ?'

' Has any woman in the world a claim on you,

have you any wrong to right, is there any child who has a right to call you father ?'

'No, no, dear lady !'—with exultant pride—'not one.'

'Then I ask you nothing !' It seems to him that she is like a tall pillar of white flame. 'For I am sure of myself, proud of my right to dispose of myself as I will, to choose—'

She looks him full in the face as she speaks and her changeful eyes are glorious with a fire that is too clean, too strong for shyness. 'And even'—there is a break in her voice—'if I mistake you, to feel not one pang of false shame at having spoken as my heart tells me. Man, I love you !'

There is one moment's absolute silence, silence as when Death is felt stealing to a bedside, and they both appear to one another in the glow of some magic light ; then the exultant cry of the man, who has found a dream realised, a dream half doubted as a poet's fancy, trembles through the room to fill it with echoes that sink into her heart and make melody there for evermore. He drops at her feet and hides his face in her gown, and when he raises it to her, his eyes are bright with tears.

'Now you are a whole woman ; the woman I have seen flit as a silver shadow through the woods on moonlit nights ; whose smile I have caught in the sparkle of wine and the colour of flowers ; whose voice whispered to me in every strain of music, every bird's note, every sigh of the winds ; who sang in my blood in boyhood, whom I have

felt in my dreams, and who has filled my soul with an unstilled want ; whom I sought in crowds and found not ; the woman of whom every woman was but a fragment ; the woman to whom I could kneel as I kneel to you, to whom I could go for rest, to whom I could give myself, whom I could gladly serve, O my queen, my love, my dear love !'

And outside the snow falls softly and the darkness gathers, but inside the music of women's voices singing at their work and the patter of children's feet and cooing laughter fill the house in which love is making a carnival of roses.

John Lane

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